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E. GRANT RICHARDS
LONDON

PARSON BRAND

AND OTHER VOYAGERS' TALES

BY

L. COPE CORNFORD



LONDON

E. GRANT RICHARDS

1906

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TO
THE MEMORY OF MY OLD CHIEF

W. E. HENLEY

I HAVE to express my acknowledgments of the courtesy of the Proprietors of *The Outlook*, of *The Pall Mall Magazine*, and of *Longman's Magazine*, by whose kind permission three of the stories in this volume are republished.

L. C. C.

LONDON, *April* 1906.

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PROLOGUE

FROM the window of his little bedroom, young Martin viewed the whole shipping of the broad Mersey sailing in and out upon the tide. You are not to suppose, however, that Martin held more than a boy's careless interest in the fine, moving spectacle: the round-hulled merchantmen; slim, black slavers with their raking spars; and towering men-of-war, that daily appeared from out the void, and drew to the thriving town of Liverpool—a prolific mother of ships and gold adventurers in the year 1759; a greedy little queen, insatiable of riches, who took spices and ivory and gold dust and the price of slaves from her fleets, and sent them southward again laden with cheap muskets and gunpowder, chintz and cotton, mirrors and beads and rum, and miscellaneous truckage pleasing to the simple African. These things held no romance for Martin, for he had voyaged to the Guinea Coast with Captain Brand, his father, so soon as he was breeched, and had

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learned, at the rope's end, to hand and reef and steer before he learned to read. The child knew how the slaves were packed in the 'tween decks, in a space three feet ten inches high, shackled to chains that ran free on iron rods fastened to the underside of the deck, and how they were laid, "spoon fashion," head to heel, and it seemed to Master Martin quite a natural trade, though he could never stomach the musty smell. True, his father, Captain Brand, was a humane person, whose sole recreation was the study of Christianity, and who held the record, while little Martin was shipmates with him, of having never lost a slave. Nevertheless, the boy disliked the sea, and saw no charm in the Guinea trade, so that Captain Brand yielded to his wife's desire, and left the boy with her in the cottage on the sand-dunes west of Liverpool, to be sent to school. Mrs Brand besought the Captain to give up the sea, and to seek a berth ashore—as, indeed, she had implored him before her husband's every voyage since their marriage—and old Brand, as he had always done at these crises, promised that the next voyage should be his last. A slaver captain, in those days, would often make as much on a six months' trip as the captain of an Atlantic liner receives for a year's salary

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to-day ; and Captain Brand could not bring himself to throw away good money, and to renounce a way of life which he enjoyed, because his wife hated and feared the sea, and held extraordinary opinions concerning the morality of the slave trade.

So Mrs Brand with tears, and little Martin with unconcealed delight, beheld the *Love of Lancaster* drop down upon the ebb, and recede, diminishing, into the misty sparkle of the blue. Martin dismissed from his mind the image of the iron-faced old gentleman who had kept him under rigid discipline, and settled down to the excellent life of a boy of thirteen who knows what he wants and how to get it. Time enough to recall his father six months hence, when the *Love of Lancaster* would be due in the port of Liverpool once more.

The six months passed ; but day followed day, and the *Love of Lancaster* came not. The owners talked cheerfully of delays off the Guinea Coast and the scarcity of negroes, until there landed a brother skipper, who had sailed from Old Calabar two days after the *Love of Lancaster* had put to sea with a full cargo of negroes, bound to the West Indies to sell them, and thence home.

At such times as these, Mrs Brand, who

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was instinctively religious, supposed herself to spend much time in prayer. But, it is probable that her mind on these occasions sank to a sort of melancholy brooding, in which she was conscious neither of distinct thought nor of definite supplication. To her fear for her husband's fate was added a dread of the judgments of God. She slept ill and ate little. Martin, whose feelings were not profoundly engaged, could see small reason for these alarms, and his mother's distress faintly annoyed him. But, he fell into the habit of scanning the river from his window, before he turned in at night and when he awoke in the morning, and of hearkening for the report of the gun with which Captain Brand used to salute the cottage on the dunes, as he stood up the river to the docks.

Being thus on the alert, Martin would be often roused from sleep by some vague sound coming from the river: the shrilling of the boatswain's pipe, the hoarse cries of the seamen, the rattle of the chain cable slipping through the hawse-hole, and sometimes, when one of the King's ships-of-war was endeavouring to frighten a merchantman into supplying his Majesty with pressed men, the boom of a gun.

So it befell that, very early one morning, the

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boy started from sleep with the impression strong upon him, that his father was speaking to him, there, by his bedside. It was summer : the sunshine lay bright about the house, and the larks were quiring over the sand-dunes, very loud in the stillness. Other sound was there none. Martin crept to the open window, and a sudden flame seemed to search his marrow, and to pass, leaving him with shaking knees. For, beside the garden gate stood his father and a negro. Captain Brand was talking earnestly to the black, and his voice reached Martin's ears in an indistinguishable gabble of low sounds. The negro listened intently, leaning slightly forward, with his hands upon a great bundle wrapped in sail-cloth, which he must have put from off his shoulder.

Suddenly, steel shone in the captain's right hand, flung up with a gesture so violent that Martin thought for a moment his father was about to stab the black where he stood. The man shrank back, and cowered, as the knife glittered and fell harmlessly ; and the Captain, pulling off his hat, while never ceasing his low and passionate talk, held with his left hand the cross-hilt of the knife towards the negro, who laid his black fingers on it, and seemed to repeat a form of words after his master. Beyond, lay

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the shining slope of sand, and the still, transparent water, lipping the pebbles with tiny sounds ; and, even as he looked, the elements of the picture were broken up. The Captain clapped his hat on his head, turned sharply, and clicked the latch of the gate, as the negro shouldered his burden.

Martin, taken with a sudden fear of being seen, and a fit of shyness, dived into bed as the sound of knocking resounded through the quiet house. Without inquiring of himself the reason, the boy preferred that his mother should go alone to greet the Captain. And why, he wondered, should Captain Brand have passed up-river in the *Love of Lancaster* without a salute ? Why did he arrive attended by a negro carrying a bundle, instead of marching up, with a file of seamen shouldering his chest, according to his wont ? And what, above all, was the meaning of the strange scene at the gate which Martin had spied upon ?

The boy went downstairs in the full expectation of gaining information upon these matters, for it was the Captain's custom to narrate the story of his voyages in full, sparing no detail. But Captain Brand was sitting in silence, and Mrs Brand, the boy thought, had something of fear in her glance, as she went to and fro getting breakfast. The Cap-

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tain kissed his son, and rested his thick hand on the youngster's head with his usual solemn kindness. But, after a word or two, he sank again into silence, sitting upright in his chair, his narrow-lidded, hard grey eyes staring out of the sunlit window. The multitudinous music of the larks, singing over all the waste without, filled all the house.

When they sat down to breakfast the Captain, lost in a gloomy abstraction, left his food untasted before him, like a man seeking to recall something. Mrs Brand put her hand upon his, where it lay supine on the white cloth.

"Are you thinking you have come home from your last voyage, John?" said she, with an accent of indescribable tenderness; and the Captain turned to her, his iron face lightening.

"Ay," said he. "God has brought me home." As he spoke, the light was stricken from his countenance, to be succeeded by a look of dreadful terror; his features darkened and seemed to swell. Plucking with both hands at his collar, he struggled to his feet, uttering an inarticulate sound, and fell from his whole height face downwards on the floor, with a crash that shook the house.

The doctor pronounced the case to be des-

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perate; but, as the Captain was not actually dead, the doctor blooded him, and departed. For two days, Captain Brand lay to all appearance lifeless, and on the third, the doctor bade Mrs Brand to give up hope.

Her passionate supplications to Heaven, then, were unregarded. Mrs Brand desperately considered the matter. Captain Brand was, perhaps, stricken by a judgment. If so, the Captain must have committed some sin; and, could she but discover what it was, perhaps her prayers might yet avail, for Heaven could scarcely be expected to hearken to a mere general petition for mercy. Mrs Brand went to the owners of the *Love of Lancaster*, in which ship her husband had sailed. The owners received the poor lady with sympathy; but of the history of the Captain's voyage they would tell her nothing, save that Captain Brand had returned as a passenger in another ship, and—what, unfortunately, was far from consoling the Captain's wife—that they were perfectly satisfied with his conduct of the voyage. There was no help in these bland, impenetrable gentlemen; and Captain John Brand still lay like a log, scarcely breathing. Mrs Brand called the negro, Robin John, into the front parlour, and shut the door.

Young Martin, left to watch in the room

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above, sitting with his shoulder turned to the still figure on the bed, with its parchment mask, heard voices murmuring for a long time. Then the door below opened, and shut ; followed, a long silence. He noted these things, because he was acutely desirous of being relieved from his vigil. The light dimmed ; shadows thickened in the corners ; and the parchment mask on the white pillow, as he stole a glance at it, had grown fearfully distinct. As he looked, the eyelids fluttered and a corner of the bearded mouth lifted. Martin fled downstairs, and burst into the parlour. His mother was kneeling, with her back to the door. Martin was accustomed to find her thus, but the white and ravaged face she turned to him, with the appealing eyes of an animal that has been hurt to death, was new and dreadful to him. Mrs Brand caught the boy to her, and held him tightly ; and then, before he had finished speaking, she suddenly released him, and went swiftly upstairs. Martin went out, and gazed at the shifting, glimmering flood of the river, and the sunset dying beyond the low hills, and felt the wind upon his face, and wondered why life had suddenly turned itself inside out.

But, Captain Brand began to mend from that hour. At first, his wife tended him ; then, one day, he missed her, and the woman who had

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been hired to help the afflicted household, told him that she was resting. He was afoot again before they dared to tell him that his wife was dead, and the first time he went abroad was to follow her coffin to the grave.

Then, Captain Brand had an interview with the doctor, after which he shut himself up in his room for three days. On the fourth day, the Captain called Martin to his room. The boy, who had spent three miserable days wandering and moping, went in, pale and heavy-eyed and unkempt; and the Captain, sitting upright in his chair, trim, alert, and imperturbable, surveyed him with a gleam of kindness in his iron face.

"Child," said he, "do you remember what David did when God took his beloved? He arose and washed his face and neck, and went about his business."

Tears stung the boy's eyelids, despite his efforts to prevent them. "Well, well," said the Captain, with a brown hand on his son's shoulder, "David was a king, and a grown man, and knew the Lord and His ways, and you're but a stripling, and I see it's hard for you. But never give way for that. Why, do you know how long it was before I found the kingdom of heaven? Near forty years of striving. But, then, I had none to help me, and I lost time

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in backsliding. Now, go wash your face and neck, and comb your hair, and then take this letter to the bookseller in Liverpool, and bring back the books he gives you. Rouse and bitt, youngster—rouse and bitt ! ”

The unforgotten bonds of discipline tightened again about young Martin, and he trotted with a dismal briskness upon his errand. The Captain, too, was about to bestir himself, it appeared, for Martin had not left the house before his father's great voice was shouting for Robin John the negro. The black was at the stair-foot as Martin descended, and if ever a negro was frightened for his life it was Robin John at that moment. His eyes were injected, his legs bent under him ; he climbed the stairs like a man drawn against his will by invisible wires ; he gabbled low, with strange, clucking sounds in his throat.

Martin had his orders, and knew better than to delay even for a moment. Robin John, he concluded, was going to be flogged for some misdemeanour, which seemed to him a perfectly normal proceeding ; and he returned to his private griefs. Besides the numbing sense of loss, there lurked in the boy a certain fear. He was left alone, and defenceless, with the strange and stern old man who was his father, and who, for all consolation, had bidden him to wash his

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face like King David, and to rouse and bitt. Martin cursed that sweetsinger in Israel. What had he to do with David, or David with him? And, as to seeking the kingdom of heaven, he had heard that phrase before, and he distasted it bitterly. A passage from the squat book with the woodcuts which his mother used to read to him on Sundays, rose to his mind. "*Christian* : We are going to Mount Zion. Then *Atheist* fell into a very great laughter." Martin approved of that laughter—*Atheist* was a better man than *Christian*. . . . The mockery of *Atheist*, that hardened, honest man, rang in his mind; and, upon the heels of it, his ears were assailed by a distant, human scream of pain. Martin wheeled about, and gazed across the sand-dunes towards the cottage. A flight of gulls were rising and falling about the chimneys, the wind ran through the lean bents with a high sibilation; all else was still. Martin had heard that kind of cry when he was cabin-boy in his father's ship. As it was not repeated, Martin decided that his father was dealing lightly with Robin John. But as he was returning from his errand, sweating under a great parcel of works on theology, a covered cart, driven by a couple of seamen, met and passed him in the sandy road that wound among the dunes. A sound of moaning mingled with the creaking of the

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wheels ; and on the tailboard, three or four dark red spots were blistering in the sun.

The house was deadly quiet, thought the boy, as he mounted the stair to the Captain's room. Mr Brand, sitting upright precisely as Martin had left him, a figure of oak, was alone in the cottage. The hired woman had gone before Martin had started ; the negro was nowhere to be seen, nor did he ever appear again at the cottage. The Captain never mentioned him, and Martin knew better than to question that officer on matters of discipline.

Captain Brand fell upon the parcel of dry treatises with the triumph of one who has gained a treasure. He opened book after book, gloated upon the page, piled the volumes before him, and laid a gnarled hand on the top.

“Martin,” said he firmly, “the Lord hath given me orders. It is His command that I quit the sea and seek ordination in His Church. He has need even of the unlearned old seaman who has tried His patience for so long. Of money I have enough. I take it, the Lord kept me in the Guinea trade so that I might at length serve Him free of the necessity of wages. That is where I stand ; it is right that you, being come to years of discretion, should know it. Now, for yourself, I propose that you shall be trained as a minister of God, dedicated

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from your youth up, like Samuel the prophet. I have but one son—shall I not give him to the Lord? You will begin to attend school daily, and in your hours at home I myself will teach you of the things of God.”

Martin heard this exordium with a dreadful sinking of the heart.

“I don’t want to be a clergyman, sir,” said he, with sulky defiance.

Not a line of the Captain’s visage altered. “My son,” said he, “you have your orders, as I have mine.”

Thus did Captain Brand begin his new life and the training of his son.

BOOK I

A STRONG MAN ARMED



CHAPTER I

THE SILVER TEA-POT

WHATEVER points Mr Brand, wrestling with militant systems of theology, found contradictory, he reconciled in the manner of a practical seaman, by adaptation into a complete working scheme of his own. He was sure that he was, as it were, in the confidence of the Most High, which was a great help. And when the bishop to whom he applied for ordination so far differed from this view as to refuse the old sailor, Mr Brand merely tried another prelate, who—such is the harmony of the Church—promptly granted his pious request, and who in due time appointed the Rev. John Brand to the curacy of Lower Lythe, a pastoral district that lay a few hours' ride from Liverpool. Meanwhile, young Martin had been serving his apprenticeship to theology, and Mr Brand never suspected the profound contempt in which his son held the Brand scheme of sal-

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vation. Taught by his own experience of the difficulty of climbing up some other way, old Brand, when he went to Lower Lythe, despatched Martin to Cambridge, thence to enter the fold by the official gate. But, Mr Brand went not alone; he took with him, out of a wilderness of sinners, two prize converts, who, indeed, refused to be parted from the only true guide to the Celestial City.

Mr William Hare was thirty-eight years of age, Mrs Sylvester forty-five. Two years since, the lady had lost her husband, who had been much her senior. To this amiable couple Mr Hare had stood in the relation of adopted son, and the widow saw no reason, in that her husband had entered into rest, why she should be deprived of her son also.

The garden of Mr Hare's cottage adjoined the garden of the Vicarage; and a year's residence had suggested the convenience of opening a door between, so that the pastor might come in and out as he chose, and thus utilise in precious conversation, and in an occasional meal, any little remnants of time which might otherwise have been lost to these pilgrims.

Mr Hare sat drumming on the table with his fingers, waiting for breakfast. He was smooth-

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faced and slightly built, with a sharp nose and large blue eyes, bright with a kind of watery brightness. On his head, over his own reddish hair, he wore a turbaned nightcap, something like the ladies' head-dress of a later time. His expression was both eager and peevish. Mrs Sylvester sat bolt upright, facing him—a placid, starched, prim widow lady, with tight bands of dark hair and a wide mouth.

“Where’s the silver tea-pot, Molly? I don’t see the silver tea-pot,” said Mr Hare querulously.

“I thought we had decided to keep it for the parlour, Mr Hare,” returned the lady, with an air of patience that seemed habitual.

“But you forget Mr Brand is coming. ’Twould be a poor compliment to his present to give him his tea out of earthenware.”

“The tea is drawing,” objected Mrs Sylvester.

Mr Hare appeared to devote several seconds’ reflection to this emergency. “Could you not pour it off into the other?” he suggested, at length.

“It would cool it dreadfully, I fear. But if you would like it, Mr Hare, I will fetch the silver.” And she rose from her chair.

“Why, I think Mr Brand would like it—but I would not trouble you—sit down again,

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Molly," said Mr Hare with sudden irresolution. He watched her leave the room, biting his nails.

"I wish that Mr Brand had chosen another ornament to the lid," said Mrs Sylvester, returning with a round-bellied silver tea-pot, the knob of whose lid was a negro's head, delicately carved in ebony. "I cannot bear the black head."

"My dear Molly," exclaimed Mr Hare, "I had no notion you disliked the thing. Why—why—why did you not say so at first, and save all this discussion?"

"I can't but think it odd of Mr Brand," pursued Mrs Sylvester, placidly transferring the contents of the earthenware vessel to the silver, "to give us such a reminder of his former way of life; one would conceive he would prefer to forget it."

Mr Hare slid easily into the new channel. "Mr Brand is a true saint," said he. "He spares no discipline that may school the old Adam. Besides, he hath nothing, it may be, on his conscience with regard to the slave traffic—but he shall answer for himself." As he spoke, an old man, square and upright, entered the room. His thick white locks and grey beard framed a face the colour of used leather; his eyes, small, and of a hard grey,

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were vigilant as a lizard's; his thin-lipped mouth set like a vice.

"Mrs Molly expressed surprise, sir," explained Mr Hare, "that you should have perpetuated a memorial of the Guinea trade in the handsome present you made us."

"Truth," returned the Rev. John Brand, "I never thought on it. When I bought the thing in Liverpool, I was so accustomed to the black, it seemed natural even on tea-pots. But, indeed, I require no memorial of those days. There's scarce an hour when they are not present with me. If I wake in the night, 'tis with the thunder of the surge on the yellow sands in my ears, the taste of fever in my mouth; and I rise, and glorify God, who brought me safe through the great and terrible wilderness."

"Did you not consider the slave trade to be sinful when you commanded a slave ship?" asked Mr Hare. "'Tis a point I have often debated, but—to be frank—I never had the courage to put to you."

Mr Brand fixed his eyes upon the speaker; and Mr Hare coloured like a child rebuked, dropped his glance, and picked at his fingers.

"Why, no," said Brand. "You are to remember that the employment was, and is, considered highly genteel. I did not like the

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bolts and shackles—they put me too much in mind of a common gaoler.”

“Were you converted then?” inquired Mrs Sylvester.

“Madam,” replied the old slaver, “all the while I was in the Guinea trade—’twas six years—I was an earnest seeker of the Lord. I was finding my way to grace. Six years! And I had my trade to make, and my ship to work, at the same time. Had I been able wholly to give myself to the business of salvation, I sometimes think the time might have been shortened; but, the matter was in the hands of the Lord: it may be that the growth of the soul, as of the body, requireth a certain space of time to attain its maturity.”

“You are eating nothing, Mr Brand. Pray let me replenish your plate,” interposed Mrs Sylvester, who had listened to the conversation with a sort of polite, habitual resignation. And Mr Brand began to eat steadily and mechanically, talking the while.

“I have sometimes thought,” Mr Hare remarked timidly, “that the apprehension of true religion is something like the acquisition of an art—such as the art of versifying, the only one of which I have any knowledge. Much labour and time go to make even a tolerable poet. What says Horace——”

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“Are you still at Horace?” interrupted Mr Brand. “I taught myself to read his works while still a boy at sea, until one day the thought came to me: why, all the time I spend on this profane author might be given to the Holy writings! And, though I had an ambition to be able to write elegantly in Latin, I have never opened an heathen author since. But, though you buttress your argument with Horace, I cannot see your analogy—it seems to me even impious. The working out of salvation in the soul implies a change of man’s whole nature: a crucifixion, a new creation. How can a process so inexpressibly important, so awful, compare with the jingling of rhymes and numbers, however elegant?”

“In both cases,” rejoined Mr Hare, obstinately, “you perform, or undergo, certain processes in order to produce a certain effect. In both cases, you must devote your whole time—or as much as you can spare from the tedious necessities of life—to the business.”

“I tell you,” repeated the clergyman, pausing in his meal to eye the speaker sternly, “the comparison is irreligious, unworthy, and futile.”

“But in this slave trade,” interposed Mrs Sylvester, ever watchful in the interests of peace, “did you see much actual cruelty,

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sir? Your son was telling us only yesterday of a poor negro kept by Sir Anthony Vaughan who had been, oh, dreadfully handled before Sir Anthony bought him."

The clergyman faced her with so sharp a scrutiny that the frightened colour rose in Mrs Sylvester's faded cheek.

"In what way was the negro mutilated?" he asked.

"Dear sir, Mr Martin did not say," faltered the lady. "I daresay he did not take particular notice," she added, in the hope of again changing the subject. "Mr Martin hath, perhaps, other objects for his attention at Upper Lythe. Miss Vaughan——"

"Other objects! Miss Vaughan! Madam, what gossip is this?" interrupted the Parson.

"No gossip, Mr Brand—I should not have said it—but 'twas no harm—I meant nothing."

The clergyman's mouth tightened, and there was a just perceptible deepening of the strong line between his nostrils and the corner of his lips, as his attitude of attention relaxed. But he said no more.

"Have you shown Mr Brand your new hymn, Mr Hare?" said Mrs Sylvester, making another effort to turn the conversation. The poet left the room to fetch his manuscript, and the clergyman turned to the lady with

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his usual air of one sternly inviting confidence.

"Hath this hymn-writing served to settle his thoughts at all, madam?" he asked, speaking low.

"A little, perhaps—I don't know—I cannot say," replied Mrs Sylvester, with a troubled face. "But you have never known him as I knew him. Two years ago he was serene and happy. You would have said he had the peace of God. And now—now——" She paused, glanced sharply at the leathern face, and dropped her eyes.

"You would say, madam, that since he came under my ministration, a change for the worse——" the grim old man began.

"No, no, dear sir; I did not say so."

"Madam, you equivocate. Let me tell you, once for all, that if I could save the soul of William Hare by the loss of his wits I would do it. *If thine eye offend thee——*"

Mr Hare's entrance cut him short, and sent Mrs Sylvester to the harpsichord to hide her confusion.

"Here it is," he said, timidly proffering his manuscript to Mr Brand. "I hope you will approve, sir."

"Read it, William; read it aloud," said Mr Brand, waving the paper aside.

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"I would rather you read it, sir," said the poet, in a painful distress and confusion.

"Come, come, William," returned the clergyman, "this diffidence is unbecoming—'tis a culpable weakness. Besides, who should deliver his works better and more impressively than the author?"

"I—I am not well this morning, sir," protested the unhappy poet. "Molly, read it for me."

Old Brand was beginning to interpose, but the lady was too quick for him.

"Woolly hair and black complexion
Cannot hide the soul within ;
He'll return thee true affection,
Though he must not change his skin."

she read, and looked up inquiringly. "That's not the one," said the poet hastily.

"The sentiment is just and tersely expressed," observed the clergyman. "That you were anti-slave-trade, William, I knew, but not that you had taken up arms in verse. You must let me hear the rest."

"No, no, dear sir ; the black man seems to haunt us this morning," replied Mr Hare irritably. "Take the other sheet, Molly."

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“ Dear me ! What a great deal to do
Has the sinner when first he sets out !
He has all sorts of trouble and woe,
Vast armies of Satan to rout.

Presumptuous man ! You’d think he’d despair
Of the task that remains to be done !
That he’d fly to take refuge in prayer,
From the dawn to the set of the sun.

But, alas ! he does no such good thing ;
Like Jeshurun he waxeth fat ;
To his own vain delusions he’ll cling—
O, what do you think of that !

In his own estimation he’s white,
His soul is as clean as his skin ;
But he’s black as a coal in the sight
Of the Lord, both without and within.”

“ What is this infection of black ! ” cried the poet again. “ Sure, we are all bewitched with the negro this morning.”

“ Your fancy gets the better of you, William—’tis a weakness you must guard against—for I confess to no more effect than when I bought the tea-pot yonder,” said old Brand. “ We should do better,” he went on, “ to be considering the hymn——”

“ ’Tis only a first draft,” interposed Mr Hare. “ I must work over it again and again.”

“ To what end ? ” asked the clergyman. “ The sentiment is undeniable, the expression

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plain. I would have none of those loose flowers of rhetoric, which are incongruous to sacred poetry. In my own exercises in such compositions, I never employ them."

The poet made no reply; the light died out of his face, leaving it dull and set; he stared vacantly at the black head on the tea-pot. Mrs Sylvester glanced at him with a quick apprehension. So did Mr Brand. Their eyes met. The lady very slightly shook her head, and the clergyman rose, and went quietly from the room.

"Won't you come and feed your linnets, William?" said Mrs Sylvester, as one who would coax a child. Mr Hare neither spoke nor moved.

"Come and visit the poor birds, William—they will miss you." Still no response. Mrs Sylvester began to busy herself in removing the breakfast cups. Presently she repeated her suggestion.

"I wonder," said Mr Hare, heavily, "what it is that old African remembers—what is his secret? What does he carry locked in his heart night and day, that poisons his sleep? Did he jettison his living cargo to lighten the ship, dead and dying flung overboard shackled together? Did he kidnap? Did he go raiding with the black harpies that tore the corpses

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with their teeth? Did he cut the flesh from his slaves with the whip because they would not dance in their fetters? Did he tear the sick babe from its mother's arms, and toss it to the sea? What—*what* has he done?"

Mrs Sylvester looked at him, the even tint of her cheek fading to a mottled pallor. But her voice retained its even cadence.

"Your poor birds, William—I am going to feed them. Will you come?"

The poet looked up, a touch of returning animation in his miserable face.

"Yes, yes, Molly; of course—the birds. God be thanked, if we can make the least of His creatures happy, whatever be the state of His masterpiece—man!" And he followed Mrs Sylvester obediently.

She left him, happily busied about his aviary; but an hour later, looking into the little glass-house with the matted floor, where he was accustomed to write, his birds twittering in their cages or hovering about the room, she beheld him sitting like a dead man, the sheet of paper white before him. Mrs Sylvester carried a weeping face to the parlour. "God!" she cried low. "O God, deliver us from thy servant, John Brand."

But the old man, walking with his steady gait down the village street, was conscious of

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a solid satisfaction in his flock. He had them well in hand. The men saluted him respectfully, the women curtsied. He numbered them weekly in church; and the defaulters soon found it gave them less trouble in the upshot to attend than to amuse themselves. Mr Brand lost no time in dealing with breaches of discipline. Mrs Sylvester's chance words had awakened his suspicions with regard to his son, and he was on his way to test them. The five-mile march to Upper Lythe gave him plenty of time to resolve upon his action.

CHAPTER II

SABRINA

GREAT trees, massed upon the blue of the June sky, overhung the high red wall that enclosed the garden, so that the shaven turf lay in a warm shadow, laden with the perfume of the roses, whose blossoms still held the dew. Beyond the yew hedge and a glimpse of tall flowers, the gables and lichened roofs of the house took the sunlight.

Among the roses, loitered young Martin Brand—a broad, red-faced, blue-eyed youth, with an air of imperturbable self-confidence, as of one who knew his powers, and who could afford to be easy with the world. Beside his fair colouring and sturdy build Sabrina Vaughan showed brown as a gipsy, slender and supple as some half-tamed animal. A faint rose glowed through the sunburn of her cheeks, as of some indefinable vigour of blood; her hair glistened, very black and

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thick; her dark eyes shone quick and lustrous, like a bird's.

"This," said Martin cheerfully, "is very good; but it won't last, Sabrina."

"I have no such superstitions," said Sabrina. "The world was meant for us."

"The kingdom of heaven—what am I saying? I was so crammed with texts when I was young that I can hardly open my mouth but one drops out, like the toads in the fairy story. The world was meant for us, no doubt, but we must take it by the beard before we can get what we want."

"Well, then?" said Sabrina.

"Oh yes," returned the boy, "I can do it, no doubt. But I like a quiet life."

"Then take orders, and my father shall give you a fat living, and we will be married by a bishop, and you shall walk abroad in a silk cassock. Sure, there's a quiet life!" said Sabrina.

"The devil's in it! I should fall foul of the churchwardens, and kill them in the vestry; I should stake the benefice at faro, and lose it," said Martin. "Besides, you don't know Parson Brand. To enter the Church—that's not enough for him. He hath a private idol of his own, made in his own image—he thinks it God's image—and unless one conform to it

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he is damned, according to my father—such an one must go down quick into the pit.”

“I don’t understand,” said Sabrina. “What is this idol?”

“I should find it hard to explain, though I know it so well. Parson Brand is not content with the common religion—it seems it does not give him any satisfaction. While he was at sea he searched and wrestled and prayed for a certain secret, whatever it is, until, he says, God told him. He was shipwrecked at the time, sitting on a rock in Ireland, in his shirt; but he thought nothing of that: he was too happy. Now he goes about like a roaring lion, ordering everyone to find out the secret or be damned. It matters little enough to his flock—they are not much in his power. But I’m his son—and he was a slaver captain,” said Martin.

“I’ll come and hear a sermon from Parson Brand,” said Sabrina; “I’ll come to-morrow.”

“Don’t let him convert you—he’s a terrible apostle.” Martin betrayed some anxiety.

“Tis impossible,” she answered. “I was born without the capacity. God made me, after all, and it pleased Him to deny me belief in Himself.”

“Ay; there it is,” said Martin. “Let the

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Parson find that out, and he will set himself to separate us—he'll leave no resource untried. He will say 'twas you perverted me. He will talk to Sir Anthony."

"There will be small service in the last," remarked Sabrina. "But, after all, the storm will blow over. You have to finish your time at Cambridge, first of all."

"On false pretences," said Martin. "Did the Parson know my mind, he would not leave me there a day."

"Perhaps," said Sabrina. "And yet I think the position fair. Are you not to receive an education because you have no mind to the cassock? Your father owes you that, I think. Let him pay it, then."

"It's what I do. But I think the bridge will break, sooner or later."

"Let it be later," said the prudent Sabrina. "We have time on our side."

"Time!" said Martin. "I am twenty, and you nineteen, and every day is lost when we are apart—pieces of solid happiness sacrificed to the idol of Parson Brand."

"So it seems," answered Sabrina. "But one cannot always live in extremes. We live now from one rare moment to another; but, were we married, we should settle down to a common, everyday level."

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"I want no better," said Martin.

"But I am a little of an epicure," said she.

"I can hardly grudge the patient intervals that increase the value of our moments together, as dull grey winter is secretly preparing the pageantry of summer. Every year we grudge the tedium of that preparation ; yet every year we forget it, and count the time well lost."

"Oh, well," said Martin, "that's poetry, at anyrate."

He called to mind the bright series of their meetings : stolen talks among the sand-hills by the Mersey while he was yet a schoolboy, the girl glowing like a rose in that desolate setting of grey sky and wind-blown grass ; days at Cambridge, when Sir Anthony Vaughan came up on some learned business, for he was a man of books ; a glittering and strenuous week in London ; and, again, the summer twilight in the walled garden. But, in all these, there dwelt for the boy a tantalising element that would not do for Martin. It was well for Sabrina's peace, he thought, that she was so strangely content to wait upon events. They understood each other's minds, however, and that was much.

And while they dallied in the green and perfumed shade, a black, square figure was drawing momentarily nearer, marching sturdily along the

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dusty road which led from Lower Lythe. Old John Brand would not be tantalised, either. All the stormy years of his youth and early manhood—in the unremitting toil of a seaman, in wild spells of dissipation, in shipwreck, in starvation, in poverty and in prosperity—Brand had believed (he knew not how) that God withheld a secret from him. Then God should yield it up; and at last, wearied of incessant supplication, He had unclenched His fingers. Now, the knowledge of that secret was essential to the salvation of mankind; so Parson Brand set himself to communicate it, and he would take no denial. His son should profit by his own long-drawn, troubled experience, and should carry on the light.

Hitherto, Mr Brand had full confidence in Martin. Had he not trained him in the eyes of the Lord? And when the young man was at home his father left him to spend his time as he pleased, unconscious that the way which pleased young Martin best, led him to New Place, Upper Lythe. But Mrs Sylvester's chance words had awakened a suspicion of default; and it was a rule of Parson Brand to deal instantly with defaulters.

Upon Martin and Sabrina, then, came suddenly Parson Brand and Sir Anthony, the baronet blinking in the sunlight, and politely

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concealing the annoyance he justly felt at being dragged from his books in the sacred hours of the morning. Mr Brand saw in a moment what he had come to see; and his present purpose being served, he greeted Sabrina with a fatherly kindness, paid her a formal compliment or two, and suffered himself to be led among the flowers, like the mildest of venerable pastors.

"It came across me," said Parson Brand, "as I walked hither, how, when I was the age of my son here, I was cast away upon the Isle of Plantanes, off the Guinea Coast, serving a villainous trader, who—and especially his wife—used me as a slave. I had but a shirt and trousers, and a handkerchief for my head, in all the world; I slept on the ground; I was starved. Could I have foreseen, in that hour, that I should have a son, and that he should find his lot fallen in such green and pleasant places, in the turn of the wheel, what should I have felt?"

"I should say, pleasure, sir," said Sir Anthony, skilfully concealing a yawn behind his jewelled hand.

"And yet," returned the clergyman, "all the trouble and evil of my life—and I knew little else—worked out to a good end. Can the same end be compassed by the contrary means?"

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Soft living, dainty meats, fine raiment, the gift of beauty," he went on, looking at Sabrina—"has the fear ever come to you, Sir Anthony, of the danger in these?"

"I read that the gods are jealous," he answered, "and I partly believe it."

Mr Brand, being the guest of the speaker, let this pagan reference pass unrebuked.

As he left the garden with Martin, a negro, with a silver collar round his neck, who was stooping at work at a little distance from the entrance gate, rose to his full height, and looked after the two men, and, as Miss Vaughan turned away, the black man plunged into the bushes. Had Mr Brand or his son looked back as they walked, he would have seen nothing of a negro who crouched in the hedge, and who knew how to hide himself in a tussock of grass, and precisely when he could run forward unseen, and when he must efface himself, as he followed the father and son, mile after mile. But the two were deep in talk; neither turned his head.

"How stands this young woman in your heart? Can you tell me? Or is the matter still uncertain to yourself?" began Parson Brand, without preface.

"Why, she and I, sir, have chosen each other." Martin spoke quite simply and firmly.

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“And Sir Anthony?—I say nothing of my self.”

“We saw no reason to hurry an announcement,” replied Martin. “There was no disrespect intended, sir.”

“As to that point, I’ll speak no more upon it now,” said the Parson. “Long before I was your age your dear mother and I—to use your own phrase—had chosen each other, though with this difference, that we said not so in words. I was a graceless scamp, and I had not the courage. Let us pass that point, as I say; there is a deeper sounding to take. How stands the young woman in the sight of the Lord?”

“Faith, how should I know?” returned Martin, carelessly; and the Parson’s grim mouth tightened under his beard. His shadowy fear took form, and threatened him; for such an answer, he thought, would have been impossible to his son, a year ago.

“There’s heaven and the eternal weight of glory on one side of that answer, and everlasting hell on the other—and you say you do not know, as I understand you,” said Mr Brand, with ominous distinctness. “Here is a thing I must know: how do you—you yourself—stand in the sight of the Lord?”

“I fear, sir, I cannot tell you that, either. The rain falls equally on the just and on the

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unjust." Martin's red face changed not, and his blue eyes were placid, as he played thus recklessly with the strings of the thunderbolt. But Mr Brand was too wary to loose his thunder too soon.

"That signal's clear, at least," said he. "Now I'll give you your latitude and longitude before you go about. Sir Anthony Vaughan is a pleasant gentleman, but he is of the world. He is heathen. How should his daughter be otherwise? With the net of her black locks, the sparkle of her brown eyes—ay, she's beautiful!—she hath taken your senses captive. Your soul lies asleep and dreaming, and the devil draws near in the dark. This love is not of the spirit, but of the flesh. It must be crucified if you value your soul."

"I do not know that I do," said the apostate.

"You are fallen sick, and speak as the devils speak," returned Parson Brand, unmoved. "But your salvation is my charge; think not I shall relinquish it. There shall be no unseemly dispute or wrath between you and me—that will not help—but you should call to mind that, if persuasion fail, you are still dependent upon me for bodily sustenance, and for education both in the things of this world and those of the next."

This was unpleasantly true; and Martin, con-

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sidering what his standing would be towards Sir Anthony did his father cast him out, knew his position to be perilously weak. Sir Anthony would let all go, so long as he was left untroubled ; but, if he were forced to act, he would choose the course, however drastic, which would be most likely to secure his lasting peace. At the instance of Parson Brand, Sir Anthony would forbid Mr Martin his house ; and if that would not do, he would go abroad, taking Sabrina with him. Martin recalled Sabrina's counsel, and decided to temporise.

"Would you cast me out to starve, sir?" Martin spoke as one interested in a question purely abstract.

"A man's belly is a wonderful counsellor," returned Parson Brand. "But we have not come to that : I should prefer to send you to sea for a while. There is no place like the sea. There, you are under the immediate dominion of God's forces, which are ready to befriend or to slay you, with equal indifference, according as you deal with them ; there, you are freed from the trouble and the hum of men ; there, you have long spells of tranquillity, when you may search the heart. Since to-morrow is Sunday, you must get your gear together to-night, and we will set forth at sunrise on Monday."

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Some indefinable association connected with the words, brought instantly before Martin's eyes the scene in the early morning of his father's return from sea, years before: the sea-captain standing at the gate with the black man, the flash of steel, the inexplicable form of words administered to the negro. The remembrance affected him disagreeably. From that time dated the dreary toil of his childhood; and there, marching beside him, inexorable as death, was the same slaver-captain. Martin turned his head, as though to make sure that the black was not following them, and, stolid as he was, a thrill took him. For, at a turn of the hedge, a black figure flitted across the white space of dusty road, and vanished into the heavy shadows of a little wood.

Martin halted, wheeled about, and stood staring.

"I'll swear," said he, "I saw a black man."

"Swear not at all," said the clergyman. "And what if you did?" he added. "The black is not uncommon in this country." But, in spite of the indifference of his words, the old man gazed from under his hand at the solitary, sun-lit piece of road and the heavy foliage of the wood.

"Ay," said Martin. "Sir Anthony has a negro, but he is dumb." At these words, the

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Parson turned to him with a look so startling that Martin was amazed. The expression passed in an instant, and the Parson was gazing again from under his hand at the silent wood.

"He is among the trees," he said. "Look at the birds." A flight of small fowl had risen from the wood, and were circling upon the blue.

"To be sure," said Martin deferentially. "I had forgot you were an old tracker, sir. Now, I should never have noticed the birds."

Parson Brand made no answer. He stood curiously still, his mouth working. Then he walked forward, retracing his steps, Martin beside him, till they came to the turn of the road. The Parson, bending down, went to and fro like a questing dog, scrutinising the dust. Martin regarded him with surprise. "Marvellous force of habit!" he thought. "Once a slaver, always a slaver."

"A buck nigger, sure enough," said Parson Brand, rising to his full height, and pointing with his finger to a faint impression in the dust that was quite meaningless to Martin's untaught vision. The old man stood gazing into the recesses of the wood, blotted with light and shade, in an attitude of profound attention.

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"Shall we track him down, sir?" asked the delighted Martin, wondering how far this singular obsession would carry his reverend parent. "He is evidently guilty of something, or why should he hide?"

"No—no," returned the Parson, still gazing; "it would be useless." He shook his head, turned about, and resumed his steady walk, sunk in thought. Not another word did the old man address to Martin upon the painful subject of their previous discussion, to that young man's astonished relief, and when they reached home Parson Brand went directly to his study.

Martin lit a pipe, and devoted himself to meditation. Then he went straight back to New Place. The rose deepened in Sabrina's face, and her eyes brightened, as Martin told his story.

"I told you it would not last," said Martin; "but Captain Brand has cleared for action sooner than I thought."

"Are you going to sea, according to his orders?" Sabrina bent her black brows, and bit her lip.

"Not I," said Martin.

"I would not let you go," said Sabrina.

She held him fast, the quick blood beating in her fingers. Though it was late when

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Martin reached home, the Parson made no remark. But, as the two grasped hands and bade each other good-night, each measured the other with the eye of an adversary. The thin wall that divided the sleeping-chamber where Martin slept sound all night long, from the lighted room where the old man paced up and down, up and down, till dawn, might have been thick as the world, did it stand for the barrier already hardening between father and son.

CHAPTER III

AN ARMISTICE

SUNDAY was a day of armistice in the house of Parson Brand. No secular affairs were so much as mentioned, and Martin knew that the situation would be left in abeyance till the stroke of midnight. Meanwhile, Sabrina was coming to church to survey the enemy in his own fortress; the plan of campaign would be drawn up; and on Monday, in all likelihood, the first shot would be fired. Martin, for his part, found it impossible to form a plan, since he had no resources. The game appeared to him hopelessly one-sided; but he put great trust in Sabrina, and marched to church happy-faced and entirely confident.

Parson Brand mounted the pulpit, and surveyed the field of upturned faces, showing white in the brown gloom of the little church. There was Sir Anthony Vaughan, his thick grey hair brushed back from a high, white

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forehead, his restless black eyebrows knotted irritably; there was Sabrina, beneath a sweeping hat with a great feather; and the Parson remarked the finger of Providence in the chance, or the design, which had brought the father and daughter to partake of his ministrations to-day. There were Mr Hare, his large eyes fixed timorously on the clergyman, a thin hand hovering at his mouth, and Mrs Sylvester, sitting in a placid heap beside him; there were the smocked rustics and their meagre wives; and there was his son, his legs spread out, and his chin on his chest. In each and all, according to the Parson, there dwelt a sin, secret or overt, like an eating disease. The symptoms of that disease differed in every case; but it was the same disease, and the Parson knew the remedy and its violent application. As he held forth, the familiar, smiling aspect of common life, with its familiar monotony, its round of cares and small delights, was torn aside like a mask, and in its place appeared a dark arena, the battleground of fiends, that verged upon a glimmering lake of fire; and beyond, very far away, like the sky at sunset, there shone great gates of white light—the impregnable portals of heaven. To cross the arena, it appeared, a man must fight and combat daily

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and nightly for the possession of his soul. The least mishap, the slightest relaxation, and it was gone. He might—and this was most disturbing to the mind—he might even lose it without knowing it was gone. Unless, indeed, he felt a positive certainty that God, having undertaken in person to bring him through the wilderness, was actually at his side, that man was standing in imminent and indescribable danger. To gain that essential confidence, all else must be flung overboard; every secret sin must be renounced, every unlawful affection or friendship or association—whether of husband and wife, parent and children, young man and maiden—must be instantly sacrificed.

Parson Brand had given orders, in his time, in a gale of wind, to the man at the main-top-gallant, upon whose clear understanding the safety of the ship depended; and the narrow stone building resounded with his formidable outcry. There was probably not a soul in his congregation, save Mr Hare and, possibly, his adopted mother, who had ever felt, or who had ever desired to feel, that confident and elusive belief which, said the Parson, was the only guarantee that the sinner was not eternally destined to the fiery deeps of hell; and, while the rest of the audience were

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merely conscious of a rising anger at the preacher's implacable denunciations—for they knew themselves to be no worse than others, and were wholly content to share the fate of the rest of the world—William Hare was seized with a dreadful terror. The lines of his face were strained, his hands wandered from his quivering lips aimlessly into the air, until Mrs Sylvester adroitly imprisoned them in her mittened fingers. When the sermon was ended, she led him unresisting from the church, his head hanging, his feet dragging on the pavement.

Parson Brand allowed no lingering in the churchyard after the service. The holy ground was associated in his mind with the quarter-deck; and when he had ended service at sea, the crew were piped down at the double. Moreover, it was the Parson's expressed desire that the congregation should go directly home, pondering as they went upon the spiritual benefits which they had received at his unsparing hands. Unconscious of his breach of regulations, Sir Anthony, snuff-box in hand, waited in the porch, with Sabrina and Martin, to pay his respects to Mr Brand.

"Your father, Mr Martin, with all due deference, is a hot gospeller indeed," observed

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Sir Anthony. "He speaks admirably, and with extraordinary force; he hath an air of profound conviction."

"I should think he hath," returned Martin: "he believes every word he utters."

"Does he indeed? You interest me exceedingly. I should have thought the thing impossible. I had conceived such oratory to be an effect of art, great shot designed to batter down the earthworks of the rustical mind, or, to vary the metaphor, as the voice of one who talks through a trumpet to the deaf."

There came a tramp of iron-shod shoes upon the flags, and Parson Brand, in cassock and bands, appeared, to salute Sir Anthony and his daughter in a grave silence, and to lead the way out of the churchyard without a word. Sir Anthony, checked midway in a sentence, wondered what he had done to merit this tacit reproof, but Mr Brand condescended to no explanation.

"Sir Anthony," said he, standing bare-headed in the road, the sun lighting his grey locks, and revealing every line in his strong face, "you have come some distance to the House of God, and Miss Vaughan, at least, should be fatigued. Will you not enter in and rest, and drink a glass of wine?"

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This, thought Sabrina, as the old man led the way through the thick leafage of his garden into his plain, bare room, was like the friendly meeting of the outposts of opposing armies during a truce. For, between herself and Martin on the one side, and Parson Brand on the other, the bitterest conflict in life was imminent—the conflict for the possession of a human soul. Sir Anthony stood for a neutral force, though it was but too likely that he would presently reinforce the Parson. Sabrina, in the camp of the enemy, took silent note of his furnishings. A faint, musky odour pervaded the low chamber, in which the least article had its own place, and occupied it to a hair's breadth. A brass-bound desk lay open on the deal table, which was scrubbed to the colour of cream; beside the desk, a great Bible lay open, and on the other side pens, china inkstand, and sand-box were ranged orderly. Tall chests of some reddish foreign wood lined the walls, between book-cases exactly filled with a calf-bound array of theology. Above, trophies of savage weapons were displayed upon the whitewashed wall: bows, and pointed, headless arrows; flint axes, the chipped head bound upon the haft with thongs of hide; formidable clubs; and sharpened staves for lances. Here, was a medicine

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man's towering, feathered head-dress; there, the inhuman, painted mask of an idol.

"Are you looking at my toys of savagery?" said Parson Brand. "These"—he laid a thick brown hand upon a sheaf of arrows—"these are poisoned. A prick on the skin, and the soul will speedily flit from the poor, tortured body. A single blow from this knobkerrie, and a man's busy brain, of which he is so proud, stops like a clock broken by a mischievous child. And so in another way"—he pointed to a grinning devil mask—"will these foolish devices scare the wits from a thousand."

"These are dark memorials you keep about you, Mr Brand," said Sir Anthony, with his usual air of resigned languor.

"I keep them, sir," returned the Parson, "to bear me in mind of the years wherein I walked in darkness gross as the heathen, and when God's armies still compassed me about on every hand, though I knew it not. As I sit here at my desk, conning the Word, perhaps an impulse of spiritual pride will rise in me. Then, I have but to raise my head, and I see again the dark aisles of the forest, and the miserable, stinking clearings where the huts cluster like beehives, and the beating of the tomtom throbs in my ears like a

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fevered pulse. I see again the leapings of the devil-worship, and the rise and fall of the flames, and I hear the cries of sacrifice."

The Parson paused, his narrow-lidded grey eyes fixed intently upon Sir Anthony. Martin, totally unmoved, was watching Sabrina, who was regarding his father with a very grave face. Martin thought he read a strong distaste, even a tinge of horror, in her gaze.

"You have been a great traveller indeed, sir," remarked Sir Anthony, sipping his wine, and looking at his host with some dawning interest in his expression.

"Ay," said the Parson briefly. He dropped his glance upon the open Bible on the table. "'No weapon,'" he went on slowly—" 'no weapon that is forged against thee shall prosper.' Think of the thousands and thousands of barbarous and heathen men, living and falling like the leaves of the forest, their wisdom and their folly alike availing them nothing; and then consider this book, this Bible, revealed to Israel so many centuries ago, containing—what shall I say?—the very armour of light, the lantern of salvation, the cure for all human ill. And all in words—in words——" he broke off suddenly and eagerly, like a child. "Is not that curious?—just little, black, printed words!"

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Sir Anthony, in the act of setting down his glass, paused, and looked at the speaker, his face momentarily alight with sudden curiosity. But he put down the glass very gently and deliberately, and his even tones were unaltered.

"I have often found cause to make the same reflection," said he.

Sabrina, still gazing at the Parson, beheld in him an adversary doubly armed. Here was an old gentleman who, already indurated by she knew not what wild deeds and unspeakable experience, must needs take God for an ally, going escorted by angelic battalions. Sabrina held no belief in forces celestial; but, even supposing they did not exist, her adversary's strength would remain undiminished; for, as she knew, 'tis the belief, and not the thing believed, that fortifies. Yet Sabrina was by no means disconcerted; she believed in herself at least, and in the luck of love. And there was truce to-day; she would even make the most of it.

"So fond is my father of these same words," said Sabrina sweetly, "that he would rather busy himself in a book all the way home than entertain his daughter, so I will be kind to him, and walk home across the fields."

"Why, very well, child—but you cannot walk alone," said Sir Anthony.

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"Certainly not," said Martin. "With your leave, sir——"

"Quite right," replied Sir Anthony. "And you give us the pleasure of your company at dinner. Mutton and claret—you know the Sabbath fare. 'Tis fixed as the Decalogue."

If Sabrina had expected Mr Brand to make objection, she was mistaken. The Parson listened with a face of wood.

Sir Anthony settled himself upon his cushions, waved farewell to his host, and drew a small, thick volume from his pocket. The carriage had vanished round the turn of the hedge, and Sabrina and Martin were at the corner, when Parson Brand, standing at his gate, hailed his son. Martin looked over his shoulder.

"Come back," shouted the old man, in the roaring voice of his seafaring.

"What is it?" cried Martin.

But Parson Brand, standing immovable at the gate, returned no answer. "I will not go back," said Martin. "As well defy him soon as late. You see, he would say nothing while we were in his house—he would not be inhospitable." And he made as though to go forward.

"But you do not know that Mr Brand wished you to forbid your coming with me,"

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said Sabrina, hanging back. "He may have wanted you for something else. Come—I will go back with you."

They turned: the Parson had gone from the gate.

"No, no," said Martin obstinately; "else he would have answered. His voice carries a mile, and he loves to hear it. This is the first bout; if we give in now we lose all." And they went on their way once more; and the Parson and all his works were speedily forgotten, and all else, save that they two were together in the tranquil sunshine. There was that in their hearts set them in tune with the green and jewelled meads, the bright face of the river, the grave and friendly trees. They did not discuss the posture of affairs or talk of the future; for the time they dwelt in a world apart, in a realm which is familiar to lovers.

As for the Parson's fiery denunciations of the morning, his words had died upon the air. Martin, trudging gaily homeward through the fragrant dark, recalled them with an effort. Wholly cheerful and unabashed, he walked directly into the lighted room where Parson Brand sat beside tall candles, a book open on his knee.

"Martin," began the Parson, with perfect

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quietude, "why did you not obey orders this morning? I am willing to hear your account of the matter."

"What orders, sir?" asked Martin. But his father, gazing composedly upon him, made no answer, so that Martin was obliged to return the direct reply. "When you hailed me, I answered, but, as you said no more, I supposed you had thought better of it," said he, pleasantly.

"Ay, ay," said Parson Brand. "And yet that is a strange supposition. You and I have not dealt together for the first time to-day, and I think you have not known me to give an order twice hitherto. You had better go to your room."

"Truly," returned his son, "I thought you intended me to——"

"To leave the maiden. Truth is best; and as you have shown me your mind, so I will show you mine. I had but meant to remind you of the black whom we saw adrift but yesterday—such fellows are sometimes dangerous."

"You are very good, sir. I was wrong. Good-night," said Martin heartily.

"Good-night." The old man found his place with his thick forefinger, and resumed his reading.

Martin, sitting on his bed, grinned to him-

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self. "So I lost the bout after all," said he. "But how the good old man's mind runs on the black!"

He was speedily sound asleep. Below stairs, Parson Brand was kneeling at his desk, his hands knotted in supplication, his eyes fixed on vacancy, his lips moving, as he wrestled with the powers of darkness for the soul of his son. The candles had waned to their sockets and expired, and the old man had fallen asleep as he knelt, his head bowed between his arms. The chill of the dawn woke him, and he trod softly upstairs. As he passed the door of his son's chamber, he turned the key, and dropped it into his pocket.

CHAPTER IV

MUTINY

PARSON BRAND, in making his son a prisoner, had no other thought than to prevent his going early abroad, and even, perhaps, taking refuge with Sir Anthony Vaughan, instead of accompanying the Parson to Liverpool, there to be billeted aboard an outward-bound ship as soon as might be. The precaution seemed natural and obvious, but, like most elderly parents, he forgot that his son was no longer a child. Sure enough, Martin, awaking to an uncomfortable sense of impending conflict, decided that an early walk and a swim in the river would make a healthy beginning to the day of battle. But, when he came to the door, it was fast. Martin drew back a step, and regarded it with a slowly reddening countenance. Then his face cleared, and he smiled.

“What a cunning old gentleman it is!” said

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he. "But this will never do. I must teach papa a little lesson."

The art of breaking down a door is perfectly understood and easily imparted at Cambridge. Martin caught up a mahogany chair, and delivered a vigorous assault upon the panels. The breach enabled him to grasp the framework of the door; wrenching at it, he was aware of Mr Brand standing in the passage, and regarding him between the splinters.

"If you will have a moment's patience, I will unlock the door," observed Parson Brand.

"Pray do not give yourself the trouble, sir," returned Martin; "it is quite unnecessary."

The door crashed bodily outward, and Martin marched across the ruins.

"This is hot work," said he. "I am going down to the river."

The Parson surveyed him, not without a grim amusement. "I trust you may find it cooling to the blood," said he. "But I wish you to return within the hour."

"Had you said so much last night, sir, you would have saved some destruction."

"Truly," replied this remarkable father, "I forgot at the time. And then I reflected that I would sooner risk a breach in the wall and the wrath of a son than the loss of a son

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—such are the incidents of times of mutiny. Now go wash, my son, like Naaman the Syrian, and be clean.”

“How can one deal with such a man?” thought Martin, as he walked through the fields to the river. And, “How can I deal with such a boy?” thought Mr Brand, as he went to and fro, preparing for his journey to Liverpool. And each alike was immovably resolved to make and take his own way.

Martin faced his father across the breakfast-table, rubicund, hungry, imperturbably cheerful; and when he had done eating he was prepared to face the world—himself, alone.

“In an hour’s time you will be prepared to start with me for Liverpool,” said Parson Brand. “There I shall speedily find you a ship.” He paused, and continued, with extraordinary solemnity: “If you have it in your mind to refuse obedience I entreat you to pause. You are come to the cross-roads. Take heed. Of what avail is all the long and bitter travail of the years of an old man, if his counsel does not serve you now? You have it in your power—the fatal power of youth—to make his burden heavier, and to send him sorrowing down the hill into the eternal shade. Or, you can so change the

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substance of memory's load, that the dark shall turn to light and the bitter to sweet—and so reward all tribulation that I would not part with a grain thereof, though I had my life to live again."

Had Martin believed in his father's sincerity this exordium would not, perhaps, have failed of an effect. But, so accustomed was he to the Parson's manner of talk that the appeal sounded upon his ears empty as the beating of a drum.

"I am sorry, sir," said he, "but I cannot see it—for the life of me, I cannot see your point. Why should all this hang upon my going to sea or staying ashore? Certainly I desire to please you, but let me put you in mind that I detest the sea."

"You are spiritually sick, and cannot discern good from evil," returned the Parson. "As the sick in body are required to obey the physician, so do I require you to obey the physician of the soul. I did but show you what issues depend on your obedience, to try you. Yet I hoped—I hoped you would perceive them," he added a little wistfully.

"Come, come, sir," said Martin cheerfully. "All is not lost. You tell me I am sick, and yet, in my idea, I am sound as a roach. You wish me away. Well, to please you, I will

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go—anywhere, except to sea. There's small use beating about the bush. I will not go to sea—and there's an end."

The Parson leaped to his feet, alert as a young man, and faced his son, leaning forward, his clenched hands on the table. His shaggy brows drew down over his little eyes, his beard bristled as he thrust forward his chin.

"God do so to me and more——" he was beginning, when there came a hurried knocking on the door. Martin rose leisurely to open it, and there entered Mrs Sylvester, her placid face distressed, her cheeks stained with red.

"Mr Brand, Mr Brand, come and undo the work that you have done if you can. Mr Hare is clean out of his wits. Oh! I am afraid—I am afraid." Martin led her to a chair, and she sat with her hands to her face, the tears oozing between her plump, white fingers.

The Parson resumed his usual stern composure in the twinkling of an eye. "Remain here," he said to his son, and strode from the room.

Martin contemplated the weeping lady with an air of great discomfiture.

"What is it?" said he awkwardly. "Tell me what is the matter."

Mrs Sylvester made no answer; but pre-

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sently she appeared to gain some command over herself, dried her eyes, and turned a tragic countenance upon the young man.

"Mr Brand is a good, good man, but he shouldn't—oh! he shouldn't do it," said she. "If poor, gentle, innocent Mr Hare is not to be saved, who is, I should like to know? But if he had been Judas Iscariot come to life again, Mr Brand could not have spoken worse than he did yesterday—though, of course, he meant it for the best—but my William isn't strong—and Mr Brand doesn't make enough allowance."

"What did my father say?" asked Martin, greatly cheered in that the lady had ceased to weep.

"Why, you were in church, Mr Martin—and Sir Anthony Vaughan and his lady daughter, and all," answered Mrs Sylvester, with a note of reproof.

"Oh! the sermon—I'd forgotten it," said Martin.

"There it is," said the lady resentfully. "Everyone forgets, except the one poor innocent it doesn't apply to, and he goes crazed! It's shooting in the dark, I call it! Why, there's yourself, Mr Martin, wouldn't take any harm from a little of the doctrine, if all I hear be true—nor Sir Anthony neither, I'll

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be bound—dear me, nor anyone. And you forget!”

“But what has come to Mr Hare?” asked Martin.

“What indeed!—’tis cruel,” returned Mrs Sylvester. “All of Sunday he would neither speak nor eat; all night I heard him talking to himself and crying out. And this morning there he was dumb as a fish, and wouldn’t look at his poor birds to feed them. But that’s not the worst,” added she mysteriously.

“What then?” Martin encouraged her.

“You’ll not breathe a word of it to a soul—not even to your father, Mr Martin—will you? No, no; I’m sure you won’t. Well, then, this morning Mr Hare tried to kill himself with my mother-of-pearl penknife, which I keep for him to pare his nails with.” She paused, and went on, a little piqued by Martin’s composure: “He did indeed—I’m sure he did, because when I tried to take the knife from him he would—actually—have struck me. And then he raved and stormed, and declared he hated me—me,” said Mrs Sylvester, with a dreadful sob, “that has been a—mother—more than a mother—to him, and swore—not that he used evil words—that he would stay no longer in the house with me.”

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"Where does Mr Hare propose to go, then?"

"He declares he will live with Mr Brand, who, says he, alone can save him from eternal dam—eternal loss," returned Mrs Sylvester miserably.

"Well, he can have my room," said Martin ; "I'm going away."

"Alack, alack!" cried the lady. "I hoped you would help to care for William, for you have a kind heart, Mr Martin."

"So has my father, though you might not at first perceive it," returned Martin. "Have patience, and all will be well again."

But Mrs Sylvester shook her head. "There's things that can't be mended but by death," she said ; and the effect of so strong an expression from so meek a lady was, Martin thought, as though a sheep were suddenly to open its mouth in human prophecy.

A step rang in the passage, and Mr Brand entered the room.

"Madam," said he kindly, "this is but a sad business. But have no more fear. I have taken order for the time, and you may, if you will, return to your house ; or, if not, you shall honour mine with your presence so long as you please."

Mrs Sylvester found herself between two

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terrors ; but it is likely that her fear of poor Mr Hare was only of the moment, and so she went home.

“Martin,” said Parson Brand, “I have business that will take me from home this morning. I desire you to remain here, and if Mr Hare becomes again uneasy, you must do what you can. And try to reflect,” he added, “upon what I have told you.”

“With all my heart,” said Martin ; and the Parson took his hat and his staff, and went out.

“Providence seems to have intervened betwixt Parson Brand and me,” said Martin. “True, the means appear somewhat excessive—must Mr Hare lose his wits to stay our quarrel? Yet that would be the logical conclusion of the Parson’s argument of Providence. But there’s another view of the matter—another view—another view.”

He lay down on the grass to consider it, and speedily fell asleep.

BOOK II
A STRONGER THAN HE

CHAPTER I

THE CHOICE

THE morning brightness changed and waned, and a curtain of cloud, visibly curving as though fitted to the dome of the sky, was drawn above a space of dull gold, upon which the wooded fringes of that level country were darkly embroidered. Sabrina, restless with a sense of impending crisis, wandered in the silent garden. Now she thought that Martin would come, and again persuaded herself that he could not. Her mind swung in futile circles; she was both resolved and helpless; an adventurer bound upon a quest, to whom all paths were shut, condemned to wait upon circumstance. She to Martin Brand, and he to her—no doubt. But how? As she sauntered to and fro, waiting, a sort of fury rose within her. Who were these fathers, with their dull, obstinate fantasies, to treat her so? Parson Brand, menacing in the pulpit, was figured in

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her mind as something monstrous—a madman mouthing nightmare, beating the air—yet there he was, a solid, immovable, respectable, enraging fact.

She went up to the summer-house upon the wall, and looked forth upon the white road that ran narrowing between the sad fields—and there, sure enough, was a square, black figure steadily marching, steadily drawing nearer. “Parson Brand thinks he carries my fate with him,” said Sabrina. “Does he? We shall see.”

She descended into the garden, and went to the gate, and awaited the Parson.

“Madam,” said Parson Brand, saluting her, “I bring peace in one hand, and a sword in the other.”

“Sir,” returned Sabrina, “it pleases you to talk in riddles!”

“I would fain explain them,” said the Parson.

“At your pleasure, sir,” replied Sabrina. She led the way to the summer-house, and no more words passed between them until they were seated there. None were needed, for each divined the other’s purpose at the first crossing of glances.

“Madam,” began the Parson, “my son is greatly changed in mind. I am sorely concerned on his account. He, who was dedicated

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to the service of God from his youth up, has ceased to care for the things that pertain to the life eternal, being suddenly swallowed up in the vain illusions of this world."

"And why do you come to me?" said Sabrina.

"You know why," replied the Parson simply. "I have seen you together with him, and I needed not his avowal that his heart was very fain towards you. It may be that you are the cause of his falling away; it may be that the cause lies elsewhere, and that you, madam, behold the imminent hazard in which he stands, with a fear like unto my fear. That is what I am here to discover."

"And the one thing means peace and the other the sword—is that your meaning?" Sabrina spoke low, her eyes intent upon the old man, the hue of her cheeks darkening, as roses glow darker in the twilight.

"The choice is not mine," said the Parson. "There was One long ago who brought both peace and a sword upon earth, and I am His servant. Tell me, do you serve Him?"

"As the sunshine and the rain, and the light that shines about many and many a dark hearth all the world over—as these serve Him, yes," returned Sabrina.

"Child, child, I know that talk; 'tis but

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an evasion. Do not play with words," said Parson Brand sadly, and sternly.

"I have no other words to give you," returned Sabrina steadily. "You talk of God—why, since the birth of the world men have spoken darkly of God, and made Him in their image, just or unjust; and there is no certainty in them. They read Him in their hearts, and in no sign from heaven. I read in mine, and find naught save a vast, retreating shadow, far removed beyond all scope of human ken. Even as were the gods of the heathen, so is the Christian's God, but figured by the Jews. St Paul, when he came to Athens, found an altar to the Unknown God. And He is still unknown."

Sabrina, prepared for an outbreak of wrath and denunciation, beheld with astonishment Parson Brand hearkening patiently.

"Ay, ay," said he with a pathetic eagerness; "but what if one came who had spoken with God face to face?" And then Sabrina for the first time divined that the old man, in his love for his son, was fighting desperately to win that son's happiness in this world, if by any means he might reconcile an earthly love with his vows celestial. Beneath the thick armour of Brand's religion she saw a profound natural affection, and perceived that

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all in life the Parson desired was the happiness of his only son. Could he—to use his own phrase—pluck her soul from the one heap and add it to the other, his task was done. How much of Christian profession, Sabrina wondered, would content his despotic conscience? And from merely opposing steady resistance to Thou Shalt Not, she found herself suddenly committed to subtler methods of defence. What if this indomitable old gentleman should make of her a Christian against her will? Sabrina thought it would be highly inconvenient.

“ ‘We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen,’ ” the Parson continued, as Sabrina remained silent. “There be many who will accept the testimony of another, and are content. But I have followed the sea, where a man must behold for himself and judge for himself. At sea is no debating to and fro, no argument and cloudy disputation—we have no time for that. If it blows a gale, if the watch rouses me from sleep, and tells me the wind is freshening and the night dirty, I do not talk about it or take it on trust, but tumble on deck, and feel the wind myself, and judge what should be done, and give the orders. Do you think I would furl sail and beat to windward on hearsay?”

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Sabrina recalled Martin's account of his father's spiritual adventures: how that while Captain Brand was at sea he wrestled with God for a certain secret during certain years, and how at last God told him, when the shipwrecked Captain was washed up on a rock, in Ireland, clad in his shirt. But he thought nothing of that, Martin had said, because he was happy. What was this secret?

"Ay," continued the Parson; "furl sail and beat to windward ever. A slack hand on the helm for a moment, and away goes the ship to leeward, towards the roaring mouths of hell." Sabrina understood that the old sailor was speaking in a figure. "Now, God told me what I should do, as one man speaks to another; there were my orders—there was the chart with the course set. What can I do but steer on it?"

"But may there not be other ways—other causes—that lead to the same heaven?" said Sabrina gently.

The Parson shook his head. "Admiral Christ hath a mighty fleet, be sure," said he; "but to each of His captains He sets a course, and that is the only one. So much I know; of so much I am assured, but of no more. I am shut up to preach one Gospel; I know of none other."

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“Did God, then, give you that Gospel?” asked Sabrina. “Was that the secret? Tell me, what is it?”

The Parson’s grim face changed, its lines relaxed, and hope looked out of his eyes, as he expounded his strange creed. He talked straight on; rounding in the lighted circle, beyond which all was outer darkness, with iron phrases; narrowing and narrowing it, until the light of salvation shone like a lost star in a ruined universe.

“Believe,” said the Parson—“believe, and you shall receive in your heart the witness of the truth, perhaps at a stroke, as St Paul was smitten by the light from heaven—perhaps after years of patience. But believe!”

The old man’s eyes glowed in the shadowed hollows of his drawn brows, and his mouth quivered. Sabrina sat very still, and watched the light die out of his face and the stern lines tighten, until the familiar rigid countenance, the chin leaning on the hands crossed on the top of the Parson’s staff, had resumed its expressionless regard.

With all her heart, Sabrina desired to say: “Yes, I believe,” once and for all, and so solve the problem at a blow. The Parson might read her heart with those keen old eyes of his—he would still be forced to accept her word;

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her father would shrug his elegant shoulders, and put the matter contemptuously away; Martin would be astonished and dubious, and then perhaps—and this would be dreadful—a little scornful. All these things she saw clear as a picture, and they moved her not. After all, what was assent or dissent to an incomprehensible farrago? It meant nothing, and yet, try as she might, she was powerless to frame the words. The naked choice lay before her, and she could not choose. Sabrina bent her head, and spoke low.

“I do not believe,” said she. “I cannot.”

“Have I made my message clear? Perhaps I have not made my message clear? I am but rough of speech, an unlearned and ignorant man,” said the Parson, with a dying tone of hope in his voice, “and I may have darkened counsel unknowingly.”

“No,” said Sabrina; “none could have talked more clearly—or more patiently.” With a sudden impulse she put out her hand towards him. “I am very sorry,” she said.

The Parson did not appear to perceive her hand. “You cannot or you will not—which is it?” he demanded.

A sudden anger rose in Sabrina. “I would not if I could!” she cried. “Would I sell myself to slavery? You who once enslaved men’s

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bodies—you go about to enslave their souls, which God made free !”

Parson Brand looked at her sadly and darkly.

“ ‘ If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maranatha,’ ” said he, and rose up and went out.

Sabrina sat where she was, and presently she wept.

CHAPTER II

THE TWO FATHERS

PARSON BRAND walked directly to the house, and was presently taken to the library. Here, Sir Anthony Vaughan was seated at a table of dark, polished wood, carved in the Italian manner. Books were piled about him and lay open before him ; books, ranged in fine, carved cases with heavily moulded cornices, lined the walls of the long, lofty chamber. The windows opened upon a columned balcony, whence a broad flight of steps led down to the yew hedges of the garden. Upon other tables were bronzes, statuettes, carvings in ivory, cases of coins and medals, and a miscellany of relics of Italian art, the treasure gathered by this elegant gentleman during the time of his Grand Tour.

Sir Anthony seated his visitor in a great carved chair with claw legs, returned to his own seat, crossed his legs, dallied with his snuff-box, and regarded Parson Brand with a weary politeness. The two men, with the few

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feet of polished floor space between them, were poles asunder. It was not merely that they dwelt in different worlds, that Sir Anthony moved amid the gracious and august company—the spirits of ancient civilisations long since fallen into dust—while Parson Brand habitually fought with the powers of darkness in the demon-haunted city of Mansoul: there was a subtler difference. Sir Anthony perceived it: in his own mind he classed Mr Brand among the animal herd of the people. The Parson, in Sir Anthony's view, ranked not by nature among gentlefolk—a distinction the Parson himself, it is probable, never considered. Had he done so he would have despised it. That, according to Sir Anthony, was the worst of your zealots; they must needs be of the vulgar—and therefore, worthy souls, were they damned.

“Sir,” began Parson Brand, “I have intruded upon your leisure to thank you for your kindness to my son, and to inform you that he is unworthy of the honour you have done him.”

“I grieve,” said Sir Anthony, blandly. “Pray, sir, what has he done?”

“Sir, he would take your daughter to wife,” returned the Parson.

Sir Anthony arched his mobile eyebrows. “Mr Martin is not alone in that,” said he.

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"But I am obliged to you for the news, which is something sudden," he added.

This easy acquiescence took the clergyman a little aback. He had vaguely expected indignation, like what he remembered being proper to the situation in the playhouses frequented in his wild youth. He remained silent, the while Sir Anthony regarded him with a languid curiosity.

"I should tell you, sir," continued the Parson presently, "that my son is wholly dependent upon myself; that, while I have means sufficient to provide for him during my life, and to leave him decently furnished with this world's gear at my death, such provision depends upon his obedience, and that he has been dedicate to the service of God from his youth up."

"I gather—I beg you, reverend sir, to correct me if I mistake—I gather," said Sir Anthony, "that, in your view, the service you describe, and the vows which, as you have stated with adorable plainness, Mr Martin would pay to another—another shrine, are incompatible."

"Sir, until this morning—ay, this very hour—I had hoped otherwise. But I hoped in vain," answered Mr Brand. "Sir, it is not an hour since your daughter rejected grace, and flung away salvation with both hands."

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"Youth," observed Sir Anthony, taking snuff, "is ever precipitate. We must make allowances, reverend sir. But you interest me exceedingly. Pray continue."

The Parson's heavy brows drew down and his grey beard quivered. "Sir," said he, "I will. I will deal plainly with you, as I did but now with that pretty piece of fragile clay, your daughter. You have slain her soul, I verily believe, and those hands"—Sir Anthony glanced down at his white and jewelled fingers—"drip to my eyes as visibly with blood as though you had murdered her body. Had it not been for your heathen teaching I should have won her soul this morning—and then I would have given my only son to her, for she has his heart in her keeping, and towards her is all his desire. I am an old man now, Sir Anthony, and my wife is dead, and the years have gone from me like a shadow, but bright and fierce, though it were yesterday, do I remember the love of the youth for the maiden—of the maiden for the youth."

"Alas! the fleeting years. *Labuntur anni nec pietas moram rugis et instanti senectæ afferet indomitæque morti*: 'Not piety may save from wrinkled age, and death unconquerable,' " murmured Sir Anthony.

"Ay; the heathen poet spoke truth," re-

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turned the Parson. "I too have known the seduction of the ancients, and hearkened to the siren's disastrous song. How shall your heathen writers avail you now?"

"Truly, I was but now at work upon a poor rendering of the *Odes*," said Sir Anthony, with a deprecatory glance at the blotted paper on his desk.

"Such is your life!" Parson Brand continued, sternly. "Meanwhile, the lamp of God burns on unheeded—and behold, even as we speak, here are two lives broken. Mine shall be the sword that disparts them—and few know the bitterness of separation better than I. At such a price shall I save my son."

"It seems to me—I may be mistaken, but I would venture to suggest—that, perhaps, one is reckoning a thought too confidently. There are, I should point out, the young people themselves. What, for instance, if my friend Mr Martin should be so headstrong as to refuse the paternal sacrifice? Such things have been," suggested Sir Anthony mildly.

"He hath refused," said Brand sombrely. "Therefore do I crave your aid, Sir Anthony."

"Ah!" said Sir Anthony. He opened his snuff-box, and paused, with his hand on the lid, gazing expectantly at the other.

"On Saturday I questioned him, and he

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confessed to me and denied his vocation. Yesterday, being the Sabbath, I pretermitted all action in my private affairs. This morning, I would have carried him forthwith to sea—there is no cure like the breath of the sea—but he would not go. Then I came hither, if, perchance, my poor words might avail with your daughter. They availed not. Now I come to you, Sir Anthony Vaughan, and I ask you plainly, will you have a penniless boy, a pervert from his early faith, to marry your daughter?”

“And I, Mr Brand, will answer you as plainly—I will not,” returned Sir Anthony pleasantly.

“Then, sir, you must take action, and that instantly,” said the Parson, “for, as sure as the sun shines, if you do not, my son will take your daughter. Be it soon or late, he will have his will, or I know him not,” said the Parson, not without a glimpse of pride in his offspring.

Sir Anthony rose, and paced the room back and forth, his hands clasped behind him. It was true that he had allowed matters to run their own course; the girl, he had decided, must take her chance; and, after all, the young man was a gentleman, and pleasant company withal. Now this fanatic parson

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must needs bring about a crisis. Sir Anthony decided to temporise. He paused in his walk, and stood in front of Parson Brand, who had also risen.

“‘By different means we arrive at the same end,’ as saith the wise man,” began Sir Anthony; and the Parson observed that the other’s habitual languor had given place to a sudden alertness and decision. “You and I, Mr Brand, are at one in this matter. You have requested my aid. Let me, then, ask you in return to accede to my suggestion. If Mr Martin will not put to sea—and I don’t care to own I am far from blaming him—he may still be persuaded to leave these parts a while. Let me ask him to go upon some business for me to Liverpool. Once he is there I think, perhaps, he may yet go to sea.”

Mr Brand shook his head. “He is no boy,” said he, “to be tempted with he knows not what. I had him to sea before he was breeched, and taught him to hand and steer before he learned his letters.”

“That which I had in my mind,” said Sir Anthony significantly, “is apt to use force rather than persuasion.”

The two men looked each other in the eyes.

“You mean the press-gang, as I take it,” said Parson Brand, simply.

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Sir Anthony replied by an indescribable gesture, as though he would shift the responsibility of this indiscreet candour and its possible consequences, upon the other. The Parson frowned.

"I love plain speaking," said he. "The boy hath had his will. Now let another gird him and carry him whither he will not. I'll put no hand to the business, but I'll not stay it by so much as a word."

"Well, well, this is to look at the thing in its blackest hue," observed Sir Anthony, inly reflecting that every clergyman was a Jesuit at heart. "We will hope to avoid the last resort. Give me leave a moment, dear sir."

He sat down before his desk, wrote a letter, and handed it to the Parson. The letter requested Martin, as an inestimable favour, to proceed at once to Liverpool, in order to transact a piece of confidential business of singular importance to the writer, and added that instructions would be forwarded to him.

"But will he go?" asked Mr Brand, gloomily.

"Why, you see the alternative of visiting here is denied him," responded Sir Anthony, sealing the letter.

"I thank you. I will myself carry it," said the Parson. He took the packet, and paused.

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"I thank you, Sir Anthony, for that you have heard me with much patience and courtesy," said he. "Farewell."

As the Parson marched down the road leading to the gate, between a trimmed and thick shrubbery, some nameless impulse caused him to turn his head. Instantly he swung about, and grasped his staff, and stood staring, for he had seen a black head peer from the leaves, to be immediately withdrawn. But when, the next moment, the Parson walked resolutely to the spot, and burst into the bushes, he found no negro, and no sign of him save a broken twig here and there.

"Get thee behind me, Sathanas," said the Parson, and walked resolutely homeward, and never turned his head. But the sweat stood in beads upon his forehead; and he continually wiped it away, and it continually started forth.

Meanwhile, Sir Anthony returned to his books. But he sat for long looking beyond them through the window upon the sullen sky and the silent garden. When he met Sabrina at dinner, he told her that affairs called him to Liverpool for a day or more. Neither mentioned the name of Parson Brand.

CHAPTER III

THE PRESS-GANG

THE same evening Martin Brand sat in an upper room at the sign of "The Trade's Increase" and drank his pint of sherry and reviewed the day's events. The posture of affairs was by no means clear to him. Evidently, since Mr Brand had brought him a letter from Sir Anthony, the Parson had visited Upper Lythe—and for what purpose, if not to discuss Martin's attitude towards his father with the other father whom it concerned? The natural upshot of such a conversation would have been, Martin supposed, a polite intimation from Sir Anthony Vaughan forbidding him, in effect, the house. But, instead, here was a friendly missive, begging Mr Martin to employ his talents in Sir Anthony's service. As well have inquired of the painted idol kept as a means of grace by his father, as have asked Parson Brand to explain the matter. But it might be that Sir

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Anthony, persuaded by Sabrina, was actually desirous of serving his interests. Martin, with the pleasing conceit of youth, was much inclined to this supposition. Or again, it was possible that the two fathers had compromised upon an arrangement for securing Martin's absence. It appeared to Martin that a visit to Upper Lythe might help to solve the problem; moreover, he had no idea of departing without enacting a farewell scene with Sabrina. So he rode direct to New Place, taking Upper Lythe on his way to Liverpool.

But his hopes were frustrated, for he met Sir Anthony strolling leisurely near the fine wrought-iron gates of his house; and that astute gentleman shook him warmly by the hand, regretted extremely that Miss Vaughan was indisposed, promised to send him word within a day or two, and commended him to the tavern of "The Trade's Increase" in Liverpool. So Martin took the road, puzzled, but complacent as usual. The pair of fathers might do with him as they would, so long as their methods corresponded with his liking; and Martin, with a stout purse in his pocket, had no objection in life to a holiday in the slave-trade city.

Revolving these matters in his mind as he sat in a state of great ease and contentment

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in his inn, Martin's attention was diverted by a noise of cries from the river that ran beneath the windows. He went out upon the wooden balcony, and leaned upon the rail. In the late summer twilight, the figures of the ships still showed distinct upon the broken gleam of the broad and moving waters. Moored in midstream, the *Vengeance* man-of-war rode like a duck upon the stream, her buxom lines indicating a French-built ship; for, indeed, as Martin knew, she had been lately captured from the national enemy. A stout whaling ship was in the act of mooring near her, the cable rattling through the hawse-holes, the men busy aloft furling the sails. A couple of man-of-war cutters lay alongside, and the King's sailors were climbing aboard. Even as Martin looked, the crew of the whaler slid swiftly from aloft, as though to repel this invasion, and at the same moment four seaboats, fully manned, dropped from the davits of the *Vengeance*, and pulled swiftly towards the whaler, the men swinging backward to the level of the gunwale at every stroke.

The Seven Years' War with France was in full action; and Martin, to his infinite gratification, realised that he was about to view one of those desperate raids upon a home-

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coming merchantman, by means of which the press-gang reinforced the ranks of the Royal Navy. The four boats' crews boarded the whaler in a trice, and the deck blackened with a tumultuous crowd. Shouts rang across the water, with now and then a stentorian word of command. At that distance, in the thickening dusk, it was impossible clearly to perceive what was going forward. But Martin could distinguish the figure of the naval officer standing majestically alone upon the quarter-deck, and among the dark press of figures in the waist he caught the shimmer of steel. It seemed that the whalemens were about to make a fight for liberty with their long whaling-knives, harpoons, and lances. But if they were the menace of the naked steel sufficed; the navy men would not then push the business to extremes; and after much indefinite clamour the party from the *Vengeance* dropped down the whaler's side, and pulled back to their ship. Silence fell upon the river, and darkness, starred with riding-lights, presently veiled the ships.

But Martin had the luck to witness the end of the affair as well as the beginning; for, the next morning, as he was walking in the city, he was aware of a great crowd thronging about the Custom-House. Hither,

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according to an excited bystander, the crew of the whaler had come in a body to take refuge—protesting that the press-gang had no rights upon whaling ships—and hither had marched a strong contingent from the *Vengeance*. Both parties were within, and the magistrates were hearing the case. There was not a doubt, added Martin's informant, that the magistrates would protect the honest whaling men from the bloody King's men of the gang. As he spoke there came a ringing clatter of broken glass, one of the tall, latticed windows of the Custom-House was broken from within, and a large, bald-headed body in a blue coat, clutching and struggling, was hove bodily out into the street, and fell among the crowd. His wig followed, sailing up into the air like a bird, and pitching far from the little vortex of sympathetic townsmen who were succouring their outraged representative; for word ran from lip to lip that it was the presiding magistrate who had been flung out of window by the men of the *Vengeance*.

The doors of the Custom-House opened, and a file of naval seamen, with drawn cutlasses, shoved a way through the hooting crowd, carrying with them six of the whale ship's company. There was a deal of noisy

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execration from the multitude, and a few stones were thrown; but the steel kept the rabble at arm's length, and the whole crowd streamed down to the waterside.

When Martin returned to his inn, he found a smallish, alert young gentleman in possession of the red-curtained parlour behind the common room. The stranger had a head too big for his body, a freckled face as round as an apple, and a quick, light eye. It seemed to Martin that he knew the man, and the next moment he was sure of him, for the other rose, and held out his hand.

"Why, 'tis Humphrey Brooke!" cried Martin.

"Not so loud, by your leave, old Brand," returned the little man. "Mr Humphrey, if you please; the other name is not in popular favour at this moment."

Martin carried his old schoolfellow upstairs, and requested an explanation.

"Were you passing the Customs this morning, by any chance? Ah! well, you saw. That was me—all me!" Mr Humphrey smiled complacently. "Did you remark the fat man that fell out of window? 'Twas his own fault. These lousy magistrates should know better than to interfere with His Majesty's service."

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"What, are you in the service? Has the sea claimed you too?" said Martin.

"I should think it had. Midshipman to second lieutenant of the *Vengeance* since you faked my Latin verse for me," returned Humphrey Brooke, with modest consciousness of merit. "Though I may tell you, Brand," he added seriously, "I'm not overfond of this press-gang job. The jettisoning of the fat man was the only bright spot in this morning's work for me. I applied for a couple of days' leave as soon as I came aboard, and got it, as you see. The old man was glad to put me on the beach, too, for there'll be the devil's own stir over this morning's racket. There's warrants out, for sure, by this time, and the boats of the janissaries are hanging off and on the *Vengeance*. 'Where's Mr Brooke?' 'Extremely regret — don't know — can't say — away on leave,' says the skipper. Meanwhile a peaceful civilian called Humphrey is warming his claret at the sign of 'The Trade's Increase,'—and a damned good sign, too. But what brings you here, old Brand? Are you in a clove hitch, like poor Mr Humphrey?"

Martin told his old friend as much as he thought fit of his predicament. Brooke heard him with great attention.

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"So you wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea? Well, and I don't blame you—in a rat-ridden merchant bottom, too. Every man cries down his own trade, but you might do worse than the service, now there's prize-money going and we're so gallus short-handed."

"There's another quid for you to chew," continued Mr Humphrey, after a pause, "you may be taken willy-nilly every day you lie in this port. The press is no respecter of persons, as you saw, and you've a fine, fleshy, tempting look to you, Brand. I doubt my ruffians couldn't resist you—they'd pluck you from your moorings like a ripe banana."

"Would they?" returned Martin, undisturbed. "Then I must even rely on the protection of one Mr Humphrey."

"Why, ay," said Brooke gravely; "if I were there at the time and could do it. But I tell you honestly it might easily befall that I should be helpless in the matter—it might be a case of the service first, d'ye see? But come," he added, "this is dry talk—only I thought you should be warned. Let us have another bottle, and a turn at the cards."

And the two young men gambled with great enjoyment until far into the night.

CHAPTER IV

PLOT

THE next morning a note was brought to Martin's bedside, wherein Sir Anthony Vaughan begged the favour of the young man's company at his lodgings. That Sabrina would not be there Martin was assured, and yet he hoped she would be, and he hurried to the house. Sir Anthony, clad in a fine, flowered dressing-gown, was seated amid a litter of manuscript and printers' slips—and alone.

"'Tis a shame to prostitute your leisure to such work as this," drawled Sir Anthony in the extremity of languor, indicating the papers, "but I knew I might rely on your good offices, Mr Martin, to preserve the wits of a brother scholar. These printers are fit for nothing but to drive a man to Bedlam. I am dragged from my pastoral seclusion to wrestle with beasts in their native lair. This disgusting town! I can-

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not forgive myself for having brought you hither, still less for having brought myself."

"Why, sir, there's plenty of life here and plenty of liquor," said Martin cheerfully.

"Is there? I had not observed it. Tell me," said Sir Anthony.

Whereupon Martin related what he had seen of the doings of the press-gang, omitting, however, all reference to his quondam school-fellow, Lieutenant Brooke, out of respect towards the confidence of that gentleman.

"Dear me!" said Sir Anthony. "You interest me extremely. But how salutary for the citizen—a wealthy shipowner, battenning on the skimmed wages and abominable food and inexpressible hardships of the sailor, I doubt not—how purely salutary! What did you say was the name of the ship-of-war in question?"

"The *Vengeance*, twenty-six guns. She was formerly a French privateer, but we captured her," said Martin with all the pride of the native-born. "She lies moored in the stream—you can tell her by her tumble-home."

"Not I, I assure you," returned Sir Anthony. "Pray, Mr Martin, what is a tumble-home?"

"The swelling of the hull outwards, like—like a baluster in a balustrade—or the breast of a swan," replied the expert.

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"I prefer the latter simile of the two," murmured Sir Anthony, and changed the subject to the work in hand.

Sir Anthony proposed remuneration for such assistance as Martin should render in supervising the passage of Sir Anthony's book through the press, but Martin, with youth's sublime indifference to sordid gain, refused it.

"My father would not wish it," said he with dignity.

"Well, well," said Sir Anthony ; "of course, that concludes the matter. But do not suppose, Mr Martin, that I would use you thus, had I no more in my eye. I speak to you in confidence : it may be that I shall be called very shortly to a place under Government, in which it may be possible for me to serve your interests. You have a fine, independent spirit, Mr Martin ; I have often admired it ; but take the word of one who hath, it may be, seen more of cities and men than yourself, and let me tell you that a snug sinecure is not to be sniffed at—such institutions are, indeed, among the few justifications of the English form of government, in that they contribute to the maintenance of letters."

He set Martin to a task of collation and revision, kept him at it all day, shed unstinted

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praise upon his craftsmanship, and contrived to flatter him so delicately that Martin began to believe his fortune was made.

Sitting over his wine with Lieutenant Brooke that evening Martin told him the story.

"Well, you never know your luck," observed that officer. "I should stipulate for something permanent in the Admiralty if I were you ; and when my name comes up for promotion you'll know what to do."

There was a tone in Mr Humphrey's remark that seemed to imply incredulity, but his round, freckled countenance—a shade paled and sharpened since his sojourn upon shore—betrayed nothing. They sat down to cards, and Martin won steadily.

"You're in luck's way, that's clear, old Brand," said Brooke. "I must find occasion to go aboard to-morrow, and raise the wind with the assistance of the purser. Sure, I haven't another shot in the locker."

The next day was like the first, save that Sir Anthony dismissed his assistant somewhat earlier. Martin returned directly to his inn, and sat down in an excellent humour to write to Sabrina. It was falling dark before he had done, and the ships' lights were beginning to shine from the river, and Martin leaned back in his chair, and fell into meditation. Parson

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Brand and all his gloomy works seemed already far away, and Martin was in the mind to believe that he had seen the last of them. He concluded that Sir Anthony was actually upon his side. Doubtless his patron was much influenced by Sabrina; and Martin could not but suppose that Sir Anthony bore a liking—a not unnatural prepossession — towards himself. Why not? And yet, was it likely that the head of an old and rich house would give his only daughter to the penniless son of a merchant seaman?—for Martin could hardly doubt that his father had told Sir Anthony of his relations with Sabrina. But, on the other hand, there were the facts. Here he was, the trusted confidant of Sir Anthony, living sumptuously every day, looking forward upon broadening prospects. Should he not take what the gods provided? . . . The single lamp of a star shone in the deepening heavens to the southward; beyond the dark fields the star hung above the great house and wild garden where ——— Martin started, and turned, for a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and the voice of Lieutenant Brooke rang in his ears:

“In the King’s name!”

“That’s a clumsy joke, Brooke,” said Martin rather angrily. “I never heard you come in.”

“Old Brand,” said the Lieutenant earnestly,

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"it's no joke. I'm devilish sorry, but it's God's truth that I'm ordered to press you into the service of His Majesty the King. No—don't attempt it—the house is surrounded."

Martin had cast a glance at the window, and made a movement towards that avenue of escape, but at these words he turned swiftly upon Brooke. The Lieutenant leaped aside, put the table between them, and blew upon a silver whistle. The room was full of armed men, and Martin was swiftly trussed like a fowl, and flung helpless upon the floor.

"I'm devilish sorry, old Brand," repeated Brooke. "But I warned you—now, didn't I? Pipe down," he said to his men, "and stand easy below." The next moment he was alone with his captive.

CHAPTER V

COUNTERPLOT

MARTIN lay on the floor and cursed the easy Lieutenant with fluency and point.

"Carry on," said Brooke, undisturbed; "it will do you good. You won't ruffle my feathers a particle. But it's a pity to see a bold British seaman lashed up like a hammock—sure, King George, God bless him! would be sorry. So give me your word not to run away, old Brand, and I'll cast you loose, and we'll crack a bottle—the first of many, split me!"

Martin swore, laughed, swore again, and gave his parole for the evening.

"And now," said he, "perhaps you'll have the kindness to explain."

"I've nothing to explain, God knows," returned Brooke, deftly busy with the knots that secured his friend. "I went aboard this afternoon to extort some advance pay from the purser—and you know why I had to do that—

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and up comes the skipper. 'You'll go ashore,' says he, 'and take six hands, and press a young fellow who lies at 'The Trade's Increase,' Brand by name, and bring him off to-morrow by the first boat.' 'Mr Brand is a friend of mine,' says I, and asked the old man to send someone else; whereupon he damned my insolence—and that was all I gained by my delicate feeling, for the skipper is a taut hand. And then I considered that, perhaps, 'twas for the best, since I might contrive to help you," said Brooke simply.

Martin sat at the table, dishevelled and very red in the face, deeply considering.

"There's something behind," said he presently.

"Ay, ay," returned Brooke; "I shouldn't wonder. Do you know her name, now?"

"I suppose if I were to pay forfeit, or if one stood surety for me, this curst silly business would be concluded?" said Martin, without heeding him.

"Why, yes—men or money, 'tis all one to King George," Brooke replied.

"Give me leave to send word to Sir Anthony Vaughan, then."

"As many as you please." Brooke eyed him with a queer look. "I'll send one of my men."

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Martin wrote a letter, while the Lieutenant smoked a pipe and regarded him with a face of wood. A seaman was sped upon the errand, and the two sat down to supper.

“Cheer-O, shipmate!” said Brooke. “You never know your luck. Why, we put to sea to-morrow, and who knows when the fighting will begin? And where there’s fighting there’s sudden death, and then, if it’s you, all’s done, and an end of trouble, and promotion for another poor devil of a salt-horse; and if it’s another comes by his quietus—why, you get promotion, not to mention prize-money. And that’s a better life and death, let me tell you, than is enjoyed by a lickspittle hanger-on of the political gang who feather their nests and starve the service.”

“The prospect hardly smiles, even so,” said Martin. “But if it were heaven I wouldn’t stay there against my will. What! Do you think you will keep me aboard, except in irons? And there’s small use to King George in carrying a man in irons.”

“Now you hearken to me, old Brand,” said Brooke with sudden earnestness. “Whether you’ll come aboard with me or not I don’t know, but unless you find surety you will, as sure as sunrise. That does not matter a curse. But mark me, once aboard you’re

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done. You've sailed in a merchantman, and you don't know. I tell you, you have to obey orders, or jump overboard and end it, in a King's ship. Have you never seen a man triced up to the nettings, and biting on a bullet, while the ship's corporal lays on twelve dozen—a fine, strong seaman when they triced him up, a sop of bloody carrion when he's carried below to the cockpit? Ay; or flogged through the fleet—there's not one seaman in ten lives to brag of that day's work. And I've seen a man as big as you spread-eagled for less than what you've said to me. No, no—don't try it, old Brand—don't attempt it for a moment!"

Martin had nothing to say, and the two fell silent, both covertly listening for the footsteps of the returning messenger. Presently, there came a rapid pounding on the stairs and a knock upon the door, and the sailor entered, saluted, presented a letter to Martin, and retired below to drink out his crown piece gloriously. Lieutenant Brooke turned aside, and helped himself to wine, as Martin deliberately broke the wafers. He flushed a dark red as he perused Sir Anthony's fine, flowing script, then tossed the letter to Brooke.

"Look at that," he said.

The Lieutenant read the letter without

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changing a line of his face. Sir Anthony, it appeared, was inexpressibly shocked and grieved to receive the news of his friend's misfortune—he went near to be distracted to reflect that himself was wholly impotent to stay the hand of law, however unjust and tyrannical, which the exigencies of these unhappy times, and so forth. Such, garnished with the most urbane expressions, was the substance of that fatal letter.

“A very polite gentleman indeed,” remarked Brooke. “Now, what like is he to look at?”

“What the devil does it matter how he looks?”

“Well, I have a curiosity to know,” persisted the Lieutenant. “Is he a tall fellow, somewhat stooped about the shoulders, wears his own hair, talks with his eyebrows, and moves as if he were tired to death?”

“What! do you know him?” asked Martin, with sudden suspicion.

“Not I; but I saw one of that tally talking with the Captain on the quarter-deck of the *Vengeance* when I went aboard this afternoon,” answered Brooke, “just before I got my orders, you know.”

“Why didn't you tell me at first?” shouted Martin.

“Why should I? Mayn't a gentleman talk

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with the skipper if his taste lies that way? Mine lies elsewhere. And how was I to know he was about trepanning his own secretary?" said Brooke composedly. He filled Martin's glass and his own, drank, and filled again.

"I see it now," groaned Martin. "O, I am a common gull! Pass the bottle, for God's sake!" They fell to drinking steadily, methodically, as the manner was in those days.

"I'm sorry, on my soul I am," said Brooke. "Had I the money you should have it, and cry quits."

"If that son of a—of a gun—was to be impressed with me I swear I'd go aboard singing," said Martin presently.

"Why, that's an idea, too!" said Brooke, watching him, bright-eyed.

"We might frighten him at least," continued Martin. "I would be satisfied with that," he added, remembering whose father Sir Anthony had the happiness to be.

"Ay, ay," said Brooke. "Hath he money?"

"Money enough, if that were all."

"And money is what we want—a singular coincidence," suggested Brooke, still watching him. Martin caught his glance. The Lieutenant, immovably solemn of countenance,

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dropped an eyelid. There was an interval of silence.

"But he knows the Captain," said Martin presently.

"But not Lieutenant Brooke," replied that officer. "And one ship's name is as good as another, I should hope," he added, with apparent irrelevance. "And we put to sea to-morrow." He drained his glass, threw it over his shoulder, and stood up. "What, shall we have a frolic to-night, old Brand? I am drunk, but not too drunk. What are you?"

"Drunk enough," said Martin, lurching to his feet.

"Forth, Fortune!" cried Mr Brooke, and led the way below-stairs.

If his men were not properly sober, neither were they too drunk to obey orders, and Brooke had them smartly into the street, marching in double file, with drawn cutlasses. "A gentleman should have the street to himself at anyrate," says Brooke, with a hic-cough; and, indeed, at the sound of the sailors' measured tramp, and the glitter of steel in the misty gleam of the swinging oil lamps, the few passengers who were abroad at that late hour scurried into hiding like rabbits.

"A naval officer mayn't be much accounted of ashore as a general rule," observed the

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Lieutenant, rolling along the causeway, with his thumbs in the pockets of his long waist-coat — he was still in plain clothes, “but when he carries the press at his tail, he spreads the fear of God.”

The two had discussed and settled their plan of action by the time they turned into the narrow and dark street where Sir Anthony had his lodging. On either hand lights shone dimly in the low windows, and as the tread of the press-gang rang upon the stones Martin beheld the lights extinguished, to a sound of clapping doors and a rattle of bolts shot home. Yet these were the houses of respectable burgesses, who had little to fear; but that little was enough. Only in Sir Anthony's house a light continued to burn steadily in an upper window.

CHAPTER VI

GUET-APENS

LIEUTENANT BROOKE knocked upon the door at first softly, and then, as no one answered his summons, with the butt of a pistol, so that the street echoed to his hammerings. Then, a yellow glow wavered in the fanlight, the shutter behind the little grille in the upper panel slid back, and the face of Sir Anthony's man peered through the bars.

"In the King's name! Go, tell your master that the officer in command of the press-gang presents his compliments and begs the favour of a word with him—and smart about it, if you please, my lad," said Brooke.

"Sir Anthony's abed," said the man sulkily.

"I tell you what, my son," returned the Lieutenant with the utmost truculence, "from what I can see of your face it would look a devilish deal the better for a coat of tar. Now double up, or, as God's my life, I'll have

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you on the quarter-deck by sunrise." Mr Brooke struck the door with his fist, so that the bolts rattled in the staples, and the fellow retreated swiftly.

The Lieutenant bound a piece of line about Martin's wrists in such a manner that the knot could be slipped in a moment.

"Now stay you here," said he, "while I go and draw the badger. When I whistle come up with the men. I hope to God I shall remember what to say! What's our ship? Oh ay, the *Venerable*—and a damned good name, too! Lieutenant Humphrey of H.M.S. *Venerable*. Make it so, and carry on!"

The bolts shot back, and the door opened. Brooke marched into the hall, and the sailors crowded into the doorway, and stood at ease.

"I must shut the door, by your leave," said the valet. "Sir Anthony will not endure the night wind."

"A little sea air will do no harm," said Brooke. "Boatswain's mate, stand by! Now my lad, march!"

The man led the way up the broad staircase, his rushlight flickering in the draught, and Mr Brooke followed, knocking his toes against the stairs, and stumbling. Martin, waiting below in the dark with the seamen,

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caught Sir Anthony's suave tones bidding his visitor enter, and heard the door shut.

Sir Anthony lounged in a four-poster bed, clad in his flowered dressing-gown, a night-cap of white silk on his tall brow. Candles burned on the table at his elbow, and an open book lay upon his knee.

"Mr Humphrey of his Majesty's ship *Venerable*," announced the valet, and withdrew.

"Sir, a thousand apologies for thus disturbing your learned leisure, but the King's business is urgent," began the Lieutenant.

"Sir," returned Sir Anthony politely, "I am wholly at your service."

"Why, that's the way to take it—and if all did the like there'd be fewer bloody coxcombs," said Brooke. "Shall I withdraw, sir, while you dress? Let me recommend your oldest clothes, and something warm and comforting beneath."

"If you will excuse the informality, I will talk with you as I am," replied Sir Anthony composedly.

"I see you don't take my meaning. In the King's name, sir, I have to request you to accompany me to His Majesty's ship *Venerable*, therein to be rated according to your capacity."

"Sir, you have come to the wrong house in

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your zeal," returned Sir Anthony unruffled. "Let me offer you a glass of wine before you resume your labours."

"No mistake at all, sir," said Brooke, with great briskness. "Come, come, sir! Rouse and bitt — time presses — we sail at day-break. Or must I call the patrol?"

"Sir, I can make allowances for a gentleman in liquor, but this passes bounds! Have the goodness to leave my house," said Sir Anthony with a new access of languor. He rang the silver bell at his side.

"O, very well!" said Brooke, and blew upon his whistle.

There was a rush of feet upon the stairs, and Sir Anthony's valet and four seamen burst into the room, with Martin behind them.

"Two hands take the footman, and two turn this gentleman out of his bunk," ordered Brooke.

"Keep your distance, dogs!" said Sir Anthony, getting out of bed. "Sir—by whatever name you disgrace your service—do you know who I am?"

"Not I! All's fish that comes to my net," responded Mr Brooke cheerfully. "I know who you will be inside of three hours, and that's a fo'c'sle hand heaving round on the

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capstan bars. Or you may be assistant clerk to the paymaster if you're civil."

"What, Mr Martin!" cried Sir Anthony, catching sight of his late secretary as he stood up, "you here? What is the meaning of this impudent folly?"

Martin eyed his treacherous patron, and answered not a word.

In the momentary silence that followed, Mr Brooke, wholly uncertain what to say next, drew his bow at a venture, and, with an indistinct idea that the question might allay suspicion of collusion, demanded angrily of his men why the devil they had brought the prisoner upstairs.

"'Twas not their fault, sir; I came," said Martin deferentially, as the men stared woodenly at their officer, with all the naval seaman's admirable composure under perplexity.

"The gentleman seems to know you—do you know him?" asked Brooke, still adventuring.

"No, sir," answered Martin.

Sir Anthony swore blasphemously. "This is a *guet-apens*," said he. "I warn you, Mr Officer, this is a hanging matter. I am Justice of the Peace."

"Oh ay; that's an old tale—keep it for the

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marines," retorted Brooke. "Come, here's enough time wasted—smack a blanket about him, men, and bring him along."

Sir Anthony, his waxen face highly flushed, was swathed in a blanket and pinioned, in a moment. At that his valet, in the grip of two burly seamen, burst into a loud sobbing.

"How did this Mr Martin Brand come into your charge, sir? Will you tell me that?" asked Sir Anthony with what strained composure remained to him.

"Willingly," answered the Lieutenant. "He was taken to-night by my opposite number, Lieutenant Brooke of the *Vengeance*—and, Mr Brooke having a little business to transact elsewhere, turned him over to me for the night, to put him aboard the *Vengeance* boat in the morning."

"And pray, sir, what is your name and the name of your ship? I did not catch them."

"Humphrey, Second Luff—no, damme, First Luff—of the *Venerable*," replied Brooke. Martin glanced at the mahogany faces of the seamen. Not a line of them moved.

"Now, sir," added the Lieutenant, "with your leave or without it, we must be marching. Stand by!"

The two seamen took a paralysing grip upon Sir Anthony. At his age, with incipient gout,

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to be hurried through the streets in a blanket, and exposed in an open boat, would be little short of murder. That his captors would go so far he was nearly sure ; that they would actually carry him aboard, he did not believe, though the thing was possible, since in those days the press-gang, in the hands of an unscrupulous officer, was capable of all.

Sir Anthony remembered that, not three days since, a chief magistrate of the city had been pitched out of window in the execution of his office. That he was the victim of a conspiracy, he was certain ; he suspected Martin of taking a hand in it ; but in what precisely the plot consisted, he could not perceive. No doubt he could ransom himself from these official pirates, but the thought of the expedient was gall to him. If money were Mr Humphrey's object, Sir Anthony determined that he should not attain it. Clearly Martin Brand must be first attempted.

Sir Anthony revolved these matters very swiftly in his mind. The grasp of the seamen was singularly painful. Sir Anthony glanced about him—at Martin, stolid in his corner ; at the valet, his face beslobbered with tears ; at the hard, fierce countenances of the sailors ; at the Lieutenant, seated on the edge of the

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table, swinging a leg. To him Sir Anthony addressed a last appeal.

"Give me five minutes with Mr Brand, sir, and the time to dress, and I will come with you."

Brooke glanced at Martin. "You see, Mr Brand," said he, "this gentleman persists in claiming your acquaintance."

"'Tis like he knows my name; many know it in Liverpool," answered Martin.

"I shall find means to revive Mr Brand's recollection, be sure," said Sir Anthony, gently.

"Why, very well," said Brooke, getting off the table. "It gives me pleasure to afford what convenience I can, I'm sure, so settle your private affairs the while I wait without. Pray, sir, be speedy; we have to catch the morning tide."

He called his men from the room, and shut the door behind him. This suspicious readiness to grant his request confirmed Sir Anthony in his conviction that there was collusion between Lieutenant Humphrey of H.M.S. *Venerable* and his young friend Mr Martin Brand.

Sir Anthony sat on his bed, and folded his dressing-gown about him. Martin leaned against the wall, and surveyed his late patron with as much recognition in his gaze as if

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that elegant figure had been a piece of wax-work.

"Why did you deny me, Mr Martin?" began Sir Anthony, with a kind of dignified sadness.

"I think I had the honour to send you a letter no earlier than this evening, and I seem to remember your reply, sir," returned Martin, with a momentary gesture of his bound hands.

"My dear Mr Martin, surely you are unreasonable. What could I do? Could I save you—I, who cannot save myself, it seems?"

"You could have stood surety for ransom, and my father would have repaid you," returned Martin, steadily.

"Would he?" said Sir Anthony with a peculiar inflexion. "Are you sure?"

"Ay," retorted Martin, fiercely; "he would. My father deals honestly."

"Surely, surely," said Sir Anthony, and stopped. There was a little silence. Sir Anthony's white fingers hovered at his mouth. Did Martin's repudiation imply a knowledge of Sir Anthony's own conduct? Sir Anthony wondered.

"Mr Martin," he began presently, "this is a highly ridiculous situation. I am your elder, and it falls to me to make an appeal to your generosity. We have but a moment before

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our buccaneer without will be upon us again. I think that you and I have had some pleasant days together, Mr Martin—but I would not press the point. I would rather say that I have ever wished you well; and I think, Mr Martin," said Sir Anthony with pathetic dignity, "if you will but resolve to master the natural irritation incident to your immediate misfortune, and let your mind dwell for an instant upon the not remote past, you can hardly fail to read the proof of my sincerity."

Martin replied nothing, but he was inwardly shaken. The thought of his old friend's unfailing kindly hospitality, and the remembrance of the continual happiness he owed to Sir Anthony's careless good nature, strongly affected him. He began to feel that the part he was playing would scarcely shine in retrospect, however brilliant it had appeared in the wine-hued light of its inception. At the same time, his resolve was unshaken: he would not go to sea, and Sir Anthony must pay the forfeit. So he remained silent. Sir Anthony watched him keenly.

"Come, Mr Martin," said he, "what is it that fellow wants? Is it money? You'll not refuse to tell me that, at least?"

"Sir," replied Martin, "I can but refer you to my own experience. The officer was

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willing to accept ransom in my case. 'Men or money—'tis all one to King George,' said he."

"What brought him to me?" asked Sir Anthony plainly.

"How should I know? I might as well ask you, sir, what brought the press to my lodging?" replied Martin stolidly; and at that Sir Anthony doubted no longer that Martin knew of his visit to the *Vengeance*. Mere resentment at Sir Anthony's refusal to aid him would scarce account for his present attitude. But Sir Anthony reflected that, whatever the young man might suspect, Martin could have no proof of his design, and he resolved to face the emergency like a Roman.

"Upon my word, Mr Martin," said he severely, "I am astonished at your temper. When I declined your request this evening, I did so with the conviction that a taste of sea service would do you no harm. Permit me to inform you that my opinion is confirmed."

"Why, sir," returned Martin gravely, "I see you have, at least, the courage of your opinions, since you are in the same case. I have the misfortune to think differently, for whatever may befall myself I cannot but entertain the saddest fears for the health of my—my benefactor," said Martin, with a faint grin.

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"You may set your troubled mind at rest, sir, as you shall presently see. Have the goodness to call in your confederate."

"Sir," returned Martin, "doubtless a natural annoyance blinds you to some necessary distinctions in the posture of affairs. The gentleman to whom I think you allude is my superior officer, and I am his prisoner. Moreover, I am, I believe, discharged from your service, Sir Anthony, and in my new bondage a slave does not give orders to his driver."

"Let me then suggest, in the most delicate manner possible, that you carry your conversation into the passage the while I dress," said Sir Anthony, acidly.

"I fear, sir, I must trouble you to open the door for me. You see my hands are tied."

Martin rolled leisurely through the doorway with a bow, and Sir Anthony clapped to the door behind him. He would have locked it had not the Lieutenant removed the key.

Mr Brooke was seated on the top stair, fast asleep, his head on his breast, but he wakened at a touch, and staggered to his feet.

"Well, have you settled it—have you got the stuff?" he asked.

"Not I," replied Martin. "We cannot frighten him—all's up, I fear. He knows it's only a bam."

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"Why, we've only just begun," said Brooke. "I've arranged all, the while you were palavering. Here je suis, and here je remain. As for you, old Brand, you can cut your lashings, and shove off for 'The Trade's Increase,' if you give me your word to occupy till I come, like the man in the Bible. Now, not another word—I've a job of work here. Pray you, take a cigar, and go."

And Martin strolled contentedly back to his inn. On his way two sailors passed him, marching swiftly towards the waterside, hauling one between them, in whom Martin recognised Sir Anthony's hapless body-servant.

"Poor devil!" said Martin. "But he's a pampered oaf after all, and 'twill do him good."

CHAPTER VII

THE DUO

MR BROOKE'S first care was to despatch the unfortunate valet, under charge of the boatswain's mate and another hand, to the waterside, there to await the boat of the *Vengeance*. The boatswain's mate had orders to report to the First Lieutenant that Mr Brooke had sent the man aboard according to his instructions. The First Lieutenant, under the impression that his new hand was none other than young Mr Brand, would report the matter in turn to the Captain; and Brooke conceived that the Captain would not, under the circumstances, inquire too closely into the pressed man's antecedents. He was a big, overfed young man, accustomed to submission, likely to be useful enough; and Brooke knew that, once in the fo'c'sle, it mattered nothing what he said. Mr Brooke, indeed, had it in his mind to make the recruit his own servant. There was,

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of course, a certain risk in his proceedings, but that troubled the Lieutenant not at all. Indeed, the naval officer of those days regarded the civilian, of whatever degree, as his natural prey. For, in their view, on the one hand was the Royal Navy, starved of money and men, exiled from home, engaged in the hardest kind of warfare ; on the other, the easy gentlemen ashore, for whose protection and aggrandisement that warfare was waging ; prosperous tradesmen, wealthy land-squires whose representatives in the Ministry notoriously filched the gold provided for the service to line their own pockets withal. And so, if Mr Brooke brought a useful man aboard, the Captain cared nothing whether it were the particular young gentleman indicated by his polite acquaintance, Sir Anthony Vaughan, as a difficult subject of whom his friends desired to be rid ; or another, provided he was equally serviceable. And Mr Brooke had, further, excellent reason for believing that, if he returned aboard with a substantial sum of money under his belt, his superior officer would have no desire to learn how he came by it. For the Captain's stern-gallery needed regilding, his gig would look a deal finer with hardwood and brass fittings, and the guns were shamefully short of ammunition. These considerations flashed

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through Mr Brooke's exalted brain, and he made his plan of action accordingly, the while Martin Brand was discussing with Sir Anthony; and then the Lieutenant fell asleep. It was but for two minutes: it was all he had that night, for the pallor of the dawn was already filtering into the house.

Having despatched the two sailors with their captive, Mr Brooke posted a man at the front door and another at the door of Sir Anthony's room. Then he explored the house; and, finding the landlord and his wife abed in an upper room, bade them dress, and descend to the kitchen, where he left another seaman in charge of them. The fourth man he set to transferring all victuals and stores from kitchen and larder to the parlour on the ground floor. Then he went upstairs, knocked upon the door of Sir Anthony's room, and entered.

Sir Anthony, dressed in his usual habit, was sitting at his table, composedly reading. He had thrown back the shutters and opened the window, and in the grey light, amid the chill and disorder of the room, he looked old and pale, and like a man shipwrecked.

Mr Brooke went directly to the window, and closed the shutters. "Order for the day—all dead-lights closed," said he, and

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called to the sailor at the door to bring lights.

"Why, I thought we were to go aboard," said Sir Anthony. "I am perfectly at your service."

"I have considered your case, sir, and I have decided that a contribution in money will best serve the State," replied the Lieutenant.

"I thought we should come to it. Black-mail is the word, I think," said Sir Anthony, with placid contempt.

"Any word you please," responded Brooke. "If you prosperous gentlemen ashore won't pay for the poor devils you send afloat to be shot or drowned—why, you must be forced. 'Twas your own Government set on the press-gang."

"Well, I too have considered the case, and I have decided that I will pay," said Sir Anthony, with great deliberation—"nothing."

"Ah! well, I can wait," said Mr Brooke.

"You'll lose the morning tide," suggested Sir Anthony.

"We'll take the next. And meanwhile, sir, you are my prisoner," replied the Lieutenant. "Sentry, see that this gentleman keeps his cabin, and that the dead-lights are kept closed."

Mr Brooke went downstairs, served out

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rations to all hands, including the landlord and his wife, who were confined in the kitchen. Then he made a hearty breakfast.

Sir Anthony, savouring odours of cooking, began to long for his early chocolate. He rang his bell.

The sentry, his mouth full, put his head round the door. "Send Jervis to me," said Sir Anthony.

"Ay, ay, sir," the man replied, and went on with his breakfast.

Sir Anthony, cold and sick after his vigil, waited in vain. Below, Lieutenant Brooke finished his meal, and went his rounds. None was to be admitted into the house, none allowed to leave it, nor was any food to be brought in, save by his order. Mr Brooke reckoned that the stores they had would serve for the time necessary to accomplish his purpose. The street-hawkers, perceiving from afar a sailor of the press-gang doing sentry-go in front of the door, avoided his neighbourhood like the pestilence. The kitchen lay at the back of the house, and there was no entrance that way.

All day long, the sentries relieved each other, watch and watch about; rations were served out according to the routine of a ship in harbour; and all day long, Sir An-

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thony sat in his close room, darkly illumined by a pair of candles, sick, famished, and furious, but dignified still.

After his one attempt to obtain the services of his man he uttered never a word, but sat reading and sleeping by turns through the interminable hours. From the big town without the barred shutters came the far-off, cheerful hum of men; within, the measured tread of the sentries continuously sounded; and at intervals, the clatter of knives and plates arose, with a rich aroma of roasting meat and a coarse reek of ship's tobacco.

At first the smell of food was acutely provocative to the prisoner; but, as the day waned, nausea seized him at the thought of it, and he lay back in his chair with a fainting shudder. As the dusk began to blur the white lines of light in the cracks of the shutters, Sir Anthony became aware of a swimming sensation in the head, and he began to fear that his wits might fail him when the crisis should arrive. For a while he struggled stoutly with the inevitable, then he submitted. To Mr Brooke, smoking peacefully below, came the sentry charged with the compliments of Sir Anthony Vaughan, and that gentleman's request to Mr Brooke, that the Lieutenant would speak with him.

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"Stand by," said the Lieutenant, knocking out his pipe. He entered Sir Anthony's room, and shut the door.

"Sir, how long is this——" Sir Anthony paused, and swallowed. "This going on?" he asked weakly.

"Sir, as long as you please—no longer," replied Mr Brooke cheerfully.

"Would you starve me to death?"

"Oh no. Eight ounces of bread, an ounce of dried peas, and a pint of water, the second day."

"Good God!" said the wretched prisoner. For a few moments Sir Anthony, losing control of himself, raged and swore. Brooke waited quietly until he had done.

"Many a poor devil of a seaman is worse off," said he; "ay, many and many. However, if you don't like it, write me a draft for two hundred pounds, and then, damme, you shall dine with me. I'll take no refusal."

Without a word Sir Anthony took pen and paper, and wrote, and spoilt one sheet and then another, and tossed them aside, and began again.

"Pray you, sir, take it, and have done," said he, pushing the draft towards the Lieutenant.

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"Ay; but," said Brooke, perusing it, "I must trouble you to accompany me to the goldsmith's. Sentry! Fetch a chair, and bring it at the double."

"There's no trick, as I am a gentleman," said the miserable man.

"No offence," returned Brooke, "but I've known the gentleman, in a day's short allowance, apt to evaporate unseen. Cheer-O, sir! It's all the nearer to the tavern."

"O, in God's name, have it as you will!" said Sir Anthony.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRIO

ALL that day Martin sat alone in his inn, contemplating, through wreaths of tobacco smoke, the blighted field of his prospects. He had lived swiftly during the last twenty-four hours; five years of small experiences would not have taught him so much, very likely; and he was aware of a singular resolution within him. His patron had treacherously entreated him; he would put no more trust in princes; henceforth he would walk alone, though every man's hand were against him. Let every man beware, then—so glowed his thoughts. He postured heroically to himself, with the pleasing innocence of youth—considering not that, in a mixed world, there would be as many to help him as to hinder—perhaps more.

He kept his back to the window, for, after one long look at her graceful figure, he had conceived a strong distaste for the sight of

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H.M.S. *Vengeance* lying out in the stream. Even so might a prisoner, his sentence pending, glance once at the gallows through the bars of his cell, and look no more. For Martin put no great faith in Mr Brooke's wild doings; he thought it highly probable that the festive lieutenant would end the day in gaol. At the same time, Martin was perfectly resolved that the *Vengeance* should never carry him to sea. Despite the solemn warning of his old schoolfellow, he did not then understand that the first law of the navy unmitigably ordains that a job of work once begun must be finished utterly—as it were from keelson to the last touch of gilt upon the truck.

Martin's letter to Sabrina lay still unfinished. Before despatching it, he added a few lines, solemnly affirming that he had resolved to take to the land, and that, if his father would do nothing for him in England, he would voyage to the new country beyond the Atlantic, and there live by the labour of his hands. Of his late adventures he said not a word.

Ruminating profoundly upon this project he ate his dinner, and sat over his wine, lost to the world—sedately cheerful, entirely confident still.

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There arose upon the stillness of the summer night a nearing chant of rough voices roaring in unison to the tramping of feet, and Martin leaped from his chair.

"'Tis up and away, for nous voulong, nous voulong,
To meet with the Frenchman and lay him aboard.
We'll hunt Mounseer Froggy from Brest unto Toulong,
Sink, burn and destroy, in the Name of the Lord!"

"Not with me, you won't, by God," said Martin, as the song ended abruptly. A trampling of feet sounded from below, and the voice of Lieutenant Brooke was upraised in command. Silence fell—a footstep dragged upon the stair, and Sir Anthony, white as paper, tottered into the room, followed by Mr Brooke. His eyebrows flew up as he beheld the stout and ruddy figure of Martin, and he stood still where he was.

"Sir," said Martin, really alarmed at the aspect of his late patron, "you look fatigued—pray sit down—a glass of wine?"

Sir Anthony, with a gesture as of one who moves in a world of miracles, sank into a chair, and took the glass in a shaking hand.

"Mr Martin," said he, "I am done. I relinquish. I ask nothing—I say nothing. Do with me as you will."

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He swallowed his wine at a draught, and lay back, shutting his eyes.

"Why, very right, sir," cried Brooke. "No gentleman expects the officer come off watch and watch to talk! Time enough after mess. Old Brand, bear a hand to clear decks."

The Lieutenant flung his heavy overcoat into a corner, where it fell with a dull clatter, as of minted metal.

"All's well," he whispered behind his hand. "Ye are bought with a price, Brand, and t'other gentleman is sold. No thanks—I have done well for the service—so all's well."

Martin swiftly clasped his hand. Brooke returned his grip with an airy nod.

They swept the table clear; and a plentiful meal was served with amazing swiftness, under Mr Brooke's trumpet-tongued supervision.

"Thank-God-Amen," said the Lieutenant, slitting a fowl down the back, and serving out half to Sir Anthony, and half to himself.

Sir Anthony ate and drank, until his waxen face was hued with a faint crimson, and his eyes shone.

They toasted the King, standing. Sir Anthony winced with the pain of his gouty foot. His enemy had found lodgment in his weakened fortress.

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“Arthritic pangs — I am no Christian, Lieutenant,” said he, “and so I have no urgency upon me to forgive you. It makes my task the lighter.”

“I don’t quite follow your meaning, sir, but God He knows I am sorry,” returned Brooke. “The gout?—Why, had you told me sooner, sure, it would have been worth another hundred guineas to King George,” he added, with a grin.

“No more of that,” said Sir Anthony. “And apropos, I will venture to give you a toast. The past is done and dead. Cursed be he that meddles with its bones! Don’t you agree with me, gentlemen?”

For answer Martin stretched forth his hand, and Sir Anthony took it with his right hand, and with his left the hand of the Lieutenant. With something of a shamefaced air, they loosed hands and drank the pledge in solemn silence. It would seem that Sir Anthony was moved to this beautiful act of oblivion, partly by the consideration that, if his daughter were to learn the inner history of the past two days from Martin, Sir Anthony would have little ease at home; partly by the obvious reflection that he had cut a figure painfully alluring to the unseemly wit of the vulgar, and partly (no doubt) by honest nature.

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At this juncture, Mr Brooke, with his usual tact, thought to smooth the little natural embarrassment in the air, by calling for new packs of cards, fresh candles, and another magnum of claret. They sat down to play. The candle flames waned in the dawn, and they never moved; the sun flooded the haggard room with a sudden radiance; they extinguished the candles and dealt a fresh pack. Sir Anthony's dark eyes were bloodshot above blue marks like bruises; but not a hair of him was disordered, and his fine hands moved swiftly and delicately among the cards. Brooke's reckless round visage was seared as by lightning, and his hair fell over his eyes. Martin, red and stolid still, showed no mark of stress.

Suddenly, a gun boomed from the river. Brooke flung down his hand and leaped to his feet. "To sea!" he cried. "Look—the Blue Peter."

Out upon the golden flood of the river, the *Vengeance*, looking, in the clear light, small and distinct like a toy, broke out a blue flag upon her halliards. The three turned from the window and swiftly reckoned their gains and losses. Brooke had won and lost and won again, and had a little more than when he began. Martin had lost near two hundred

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pounds, and his notes of hand were neatly piled at Sir Anthony's elbow.

"Sink me!" says Brooke, dragging on his greatcoat, whose pockets bulged extremely. "Sure, if we capsize in the river, I shall sink indeed, with this bullion aboard—but that's forbidden ground. God be with you, ship-mates, and bring us to another wet night in harbour."

He was gone, and his voice, rousing his men, rang through the quiet house.

"'There, but for the grace of God . . .'" said Martin.

Sir Anthony made no answer. They stood at the window watching the boat that carried the Lieutenant, with two hundred golden sovereigns in his pocket, rowed by his press-gang, shooting across the river towards the ship. Aboard her, the sails were shaking out, white as pearl, and the men were heaving noisily upon the anchor. The clank of the capstan bars and the stamp-and-go of the capstan chanty, sounded cheerily across the water.

"We are strange beasts," said Sir Anthony languidly. "Yesterday, I would have asked naught better of the gods than leave—with reasonable safety to myself—to run that young man through the body. I could have set my

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heel on his face. And now, as I see him steering away to yon tall and lonely ship, I could find it in my heart to pity him. A strange and dreadful life! Look—call to him—wave your hand—you should as easily rouse the dead. He is on duty, as he calls it—to all else he is dead indeed.”

It was Martin's turn to preserve the silence of discretion. Sir Anthony turned away. “Come, friend Martin,” said he, “the play is done. The actors should be packing; and one player I wot of stands in bitter need of a bed.”

“Take mine, sir,” said Martin. “I must take the road. I have to see a certain Parson Brand without delay.” He pointed to the little heap of paper, his notes of hand.

“’Tis true I play a better hand than you, Mr Martin, and I don't care to own it,” observed Sir Anthony. “’Tis one compensation of ageing maturity. Another, is to lose the taste for heroics. At your age, I should have had the impulse—certainly the impulse—to tear those damning scraps of paper in pieces, scattering them at your feet with a large and noble gesture. *Eheu, fugaces!* To-day, I would say to you, that, if the redemption thereof should score upon your mind the folly of gambling, I should be doing you the kindest office.” He tucked the notes into his waist-

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coat pocket, and looked gravely upon the young man.

"Where shall I have the honour to find you, sir, to-morrow?" asked Martin, with an equal gravity.

"Why, at home, I think, Mr Martin. I believe you are not used to a more formal invitation. And now, Mr Martin, this bed of yours?"

"I shall be your valet, sir," said Martin as he helped his patron up the stairs.

"Why, ay, I had forgot. Where is Jervis?" asked Sir Anthony, halting.

"I think, sir," replied Martin soberly, "that I descried him but now—though I could not be certain—in a ship—heaving upon the capstan."

Sir Anthony swore loudly. Then he laughed. "It needed but that," he said. "What a finished pirate! By all the gods that are, your naval friend should be Prime Minister! Poor Jervis! Unwilling sacrifice! I hope he will make a good sailor, for he was a miserable servant. I was about to give him his *cong  *. Why, all's well that ends well, Mr Martin."

"Amer," quoth Martin.

BOOK III

“ . . . DIVIDETH HIS SPOILS ”

CHAPTER I

RETROSPECT

ON Tuesday, Sir Anthony had posted to Liverpool, in order, as he said, to supervise the printing of his Horatian translation; and during that day, Sabrina had awaited in vain the coming of Martin Brand. His father's inquisitorial visit, and her father's elaborate ostentation of business in Liverpool, and his sudden departure, taken together with Martin's silence, seemed highly ominous conjunctions to Sabrina. She determined to discover what these things might mean; a visit to Mrs Sylvester, whose tongue knew not discretion, seemed to promise a solution; and on Wednesday morning Sabrina walked alone across the fields and came to the cottage next the Vicarage. Mrs Sylvester greeted her with a very woeful aspect.

"My dear, it is but a sad house you have come to, and I shall be but poor company, for

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a young lady, I fear," said Mrs Sylvester, with dismal relish. "And yet I am selfishly glad to see you, if only that you should hear the—the news from me, rather than by hearsay or gossip."

"Prithee, Mrs Sylvester, tell me plainly!" said Sabrina, whose mind was filled with misgivings upon Martin's account.

"I can't bear to speak of it—but the whole village is wagging a mischievous tongue by now—and I'm sure I can't blame 'em, neither," continued Mrs Sylvester, with sudden asperity. "I can never forgive Mr Brand, never—not though good dear Mr Martin said to me as he went off, says he, the old man is rough as a bear without, but kind within as a fire at Christmas, and bade me be of good heart, and I do try, but it's very hard."

Mrs Sylvester began to weep, and Sabrina longed to shake her.

"Where has he gone, then?" she asked, controlling her impatience.

"To Bedlam, for aught I know," replied the old lady. "I've not set an eye on him since Monday. Mr Brand——"

"Dear Mrs Sylvester, of whom are you speaking?"

"Why, of Mr Hare—who else? Mr Hare, who has left me, after all these years, without

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a word, to go to the man who drove him from his wits."

"O!" said Sabrina, enlightened. "And where then is Mr Martin?"

"Gone away—and left Mr Hare alone with Mr Brand—I can't but think it selfish of Mr Martin, after I implored him to stay, to ride off the very same afternoon. But young men will be young men," said Mrs Sylvester. "Not that there's an ounce of harm in Mr Martin," she added, remarking the expression upon her visitor's face, "don't think I meant it, my dear. Lord, Lord, you're grieving that he's gone, I can see, and think my trouble less than yours. Why, I am selfish, too. But you have youth and beauty, my dear, and all your life before you; and I am a withered old woman, whose days are nearly spent."

"Well, we must just console each other, Mrs Sylvester," said Sabrina, patiently. "This is a sad blow, and you are very lonely. Let me come and stay with you until matters mend. Be sure they will mend."

That afternoon, Mr Brand, snatching a respite from the tendance of a sad-eyed, stricken man who would not utter a word, and who must be forced to eat, was pacing the flagged walk in his garden, when a carriage passed the gate. Miss Sabrina Vaughan sat within;

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a couple of boxes were corded upon the roof; and beside the coachman the Parson remarked a black man, wearing a silver collar. Mr Brand went within; nor did he emerge again until, from an upper window, he had watched the carriage, bearing coachman and negro, recede along the road to Upper Lythe.

The Parson had enough upon his strong shoulders, already. Mr Hare clung to him, so that he could not rest, or sleep, or work. The woman who kept house for him, declaring that she was afraid, had gone to her home in the village; so that the necessary domestic drudgery must needs be done by the Parson, as he could. And his parishioners began to manifest signs of mutiny. The men no longer saluted their pastor, but regarded him with sulky dislike; the women shut the door at his approach; the children fled from him, or yelled at him from afar. "Who frightened the Hare out of his wits?" they cried over and over, with maddening iteration. Probably a sullen irritation aroused by his stern—and yet so kindly intended—domination had been long latent; it needed but his last fierce sermon, and the rancorous tongue of his housekeeper telling of poor Mr Hare's madness, and of young Martin's banishment, to set it smoulder-

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ing into flame. And now, was this dangerous piece of beauty, Sabrina Vaughan, come to besiege him? The Parson, adamant in all else, knew himself to be fallible in this; and he bitterly grudged the admission to that insatiate tormentor, his conscience. He had always avoided women; in his slaving days had practised strange rigours and austerities . . . and still, the hard and fiery old man knew himself to be vulnerable. Perhaps Sabrina had some intuition of her power; perhaps her sojourn with Mrs Sylvester—an experience of devastating tedium—was not wholly dictated by pure beneficence. At least, she learned what she had come to learn; for all the tattle of the village was at the tongue's end of her hostess. Seldom had Mrs Sylvester so rich an opportunity. Doubtless she, was deeply sorry for poor Mr Hare, and sad for herself; but doubtless, too, she forgot her sorrows in talk.

Sabrina had a private score of her own to settle with Parson Brand. But she bore him no malice; and when she met the old man in the road upon the morning after her arrival, she greeted him with the pleasantest smile.

“These are hard days with you, sir,” said she, dangerously sympathetic. Parson Brand

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took, what he called, a brace upon himself. There was none lonelier that day than Parson Brand.

"Madam," said he, "I was never promised an easy service."

"Service!—O, if we could meet on that ground, we might yet be friends," said Sabrina.

The Parson stood firm, but his eyes betrayed him. "There is no climbing up another way," said he, gently enough. But Sabrina refused the argument.

"How does poor Mr Hare?" she asked.

"There is always hope, where faith and charity are," replied Parson Brand. "He needs me even now. Farewell," he added abruptly.

"Ah! if only I had prevailed with her," thought the old man, as he returned to his cheerless house, and the dreadful tedium of his charge. "If only I had prevailed!"

The next day, Parson Brand met Miss Vaughan, carrying a folded paper in his hand.

"Madam, I think that I should show you this," said he, and gave her a despatch from Sir Anthony.

That gentleman wrote in the most feeling terms, deploring the terrible necessity under which he laboured of informing Mr Brand that his son had been taken by the press-gang.

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The Parson perhaps expected to see Sabrina stricken to the ground. But she manifested no inclination to swoon. The colour died from her face, save two red spots that burned in her cheeks, as she fixed glowing eyes upon the Parson.

"This was a plot," said she. "A plot between you and my father! Oh, how could you—how could you!"

"I had no hand in it," said the Parson, a good deal staggered, but standing his ground. "But I would not have prevented the King's men, if I could. Yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life; and my son is my life; and by this means God may save his soul alive."

Sabrina wrung her hands upon her breast, so that the letter crackled in her fingers, then dropped her hands to her sides, and stood looking upon her enemy, scorn and a certain terror contending in her face.

"It is all in the Book—all in words. Little, black, printed words," said Parson Brand, eagerly and coaxingly, like a child.

Sabrina made as though to speak, then turned away without a word. The old man peered after her beneath his shaggy brows, as she walked away, stepping firmly with head erect.

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"Ay, ay, mistress, you have it in the heart's core," said he. "But shall I spare you? What of the old slaver-captain—ay, what of him?" And he went heavily into his house.

Mrs Sylvester received the news with that ghoulish relish of hers for misfortune.

"We are two bereaved women, my dear," said she, with an unction that boded an explosion of lachrymose sympathy, inexpressibly terrifying to Sabrina. "But bide awhile—bide awhile. The village will not endure this tyranny for ever, I can tell you." She nodded her head and pursed her lips; but Sabrina, totally uninterested, left her to her mystery.

Pale fear sat beside her as she wept; she kept vigil with fear that night, beholding the phantom of a tall ship reeling into the dark, towards many deadly hazards. And meanwhile, her lover, snug in his inn, filled with good cheer, and happy with wine, was cheerfully gambling the night away with her papa and that rakehell naval officer, who, all unknown to Sabrina, had done her such inestimable service.

When morning came, Sabrina, like the old man in his house beyond the garden, set an edge on her courage, and made shift to face another day. And behold! a letter in Martin's

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round black handwriting lay beside her plate. She fled with it to her room, so that Mrs Sylvester never knew of its arrival. Her glance travelled along the lines—not a word of misfortune—and fell swiftly upon the date of the postscript—Noon, Friday. Why, that was yesterday; it was at that very time, yesterday at noon, that Mr Brand had given her the fateful despatch from Sir Anthony. With shaking fingers, she flattened out Sir Anthony's fine script. It bore date, Thursday evening.

Sabrina trembled, and blind Hope arose in her heart and sang, and she felt in her bones that he sang truly. Then she set herself to study the letter. At first, the words conveyed no meaning; but presently she began to perceive that something had befallen to change Martin's view of life, between Thursday afternoon, when he had indited the airy and jovial sentiments of the body of the letter, and Friday at noon, when he set down the solemn and portentous resolutions conveyed in the postscript.

He had escaped, then; or Sir Anthony had been mistaken (and yet he could not have been mistaken); or it was a ruse on the part of her astute papa. So ran her troubled guesses, amid a growing certainty that Martin

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presently would come to her. Meanwhile, the house would not hold her; she went out, and took the road along which Martin must come. As she passed the Vicarage, she spied a white face at an upper window, looking blindly forth upon the sunlit fields. Sabrina shuddered and hurried forward. "Parson Brand showed me his letter—but nothing on earth shall force me to show him mine," she said.

She carried the two letters with her, reading in them now and again as she went; and when Martin drew rein beside her, Sabrina thrust Sir Anthony's despatch into his hand.

"Read it—read, and you will understand," said she, and went suddenly white, and drooped into the dust, and lay there.

CHAPTER II

THE RETURN

MARTIN set the lady upon his horse, fetched a compass about the fields, and came unobserved to the house of Mrs Sylvester. That lady did her best to swoon, as she felt the occasion decently required; but as Martin was clamouring for food, her hospitable soul took charge of Sabrina, and forbade her even to question Mr Martin until he had eaten.

“I’m a selfish old woman, I know,” said she, “and my day is done. And yet I declare I’m not so ungrateful, neither, as to behold so pretty a couple sitting side by side, without giving thanks to the Lord that made youth and beauty—for He did, let Mr Brand say what he will. It seems like a dream, too. Why, we gave you up for lost, Mr Martin—two widows together we were, and mingled our drink with weeping. Another pot of ale, Mr Martin—sure, you need it. And you, my dear, that went without your breakfast,

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and frightened me to death, thinking you was lost—come, eat and drink."

She sat and beamed upon the two, while they ate and drank and were revived.

"Now, was you really taken by that dreadful press-gang, Mr Martin—you see I wouldn't ask you before, me that is dying of curiosity," said Mrs Sylvester, as Martin filled his pipe, and Sabrina brought a live coal from the kitchen wherewith to light it.

"No and yes. There was some confusion, the gang being active in the town; but the Lieutenant was an old friend of mine, and the mistake was soon put right. It was nothing—I had no notion Sir Anthony had written to frighten you all," replied Martin, in the words in which he had answered Sabrina's question, on their way to the cottage.

"Well, well, who ever heard tell of the like!" cried Mrs Sylvester. "I call it a special Providence—and you coming home in the nick of time, too. For there's trouble in the wind for your father, Mr Martin, if all tales be true, and that no later than to-night."

"Why, I wonder he's kept the crew under hatches so long as he has," said Martin, casually.

"What's in the wind?"

"'Tis Saturday—the men get their wages to-night, and will speedily drink 'em, the beasts,"

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Mrs Sylvester nodded her head solemnly. "They do say they're to turn out to-night and burn Mr Brand in effigy, like Guy Fawkes' Day."

"The old man has seen worse than that, in his time," said Martin. "I fear he won't be impressed by the demonstrations. But I must go and pay my respects to papa, and I'll bring you good news of Mr Hare, be sure."

He paused on the threshold of the outer door, Sabrina hanging on his arm. A vast dark curtain was drawing momentarily higher across the face of the heavens; the sun was already hidden, and the fields stretched solemn and desolate beneath the wan sky, as though held in a breathless suspense. Not a leaf stirred; no bird sang; so still was the air, that the gurgle of the river was faintly audible.

Sabrina shivered in the heavy, motionless air. "Don't go, Martin," said she. "Stay with me."

"Sweetheart, I must. The rub must come, and the sooner the better," returned Martin, cheerfully. "Those fellows will end their frolic in wet jackets to-night. There's thunder about."

"I suppose it is the thunder," said Sabrina, looking at him with scared eyes. "I suppose I am foolish."

She watched Martin's burly form striding

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down the garden path. He turned, waved a hand, and disappeared through the doorway in the road ; and Sabrina went in to her room, and lay with shut eyes on her bed ; vainly contending with a formless terror that seemed one with the throbbing pain in her head.

Martin walked directly into his father's house. As he opened the door, the close smell of the place struck upon his nerves with some unnamed force of association ; a moment, and he saw again, as in his boyhood, the wet and heaving decks, the bowed black figures, seated a-row ; heard the wind booming in the sails, and caught the musky reek of the slave ship. The illusion passed, and Martin walked into his father's room. The snowy boards of the floor, and the Indian strips of matting, were defiled with the prints of muddy feet ; the casements were shut, the glass dusty, and buzzed upon by clusters of flies. Books and papers were strewn upon the table, amid a greasy disorder of unwashed plates. Martin stood in amazement ; for the tautest captain in the navy was not more exigent than Parson Brand, in the speckless order of his habitation.

"Who's there?" cried the familiar, rough voice. The familiar sturdy tread rang upon the bricked passage, together with an uncertain shuffling noise ; and there was Parson

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Brand in the doorway. He looked so old and grim and sad, that Martin's heart smote him. Over the Parson's shoulder peered a white, blinking face, a dirty turban perched on its ragged locks, fingers picking at its shaking lips.

Parson Brand stood like a figure of stone. "Martin!" said he; and his voice was like the voice of a stranger.

"As you see, sir," said Martin, cheerily.

A change swept upon the old man, like the breath of wind upon still water; he stirred and trembled, and took a step forward, peering up at his tall son.

"My son, my son—is it even you? My son that was dead and is alive again?"

He took Martin's hands in both his own, and fondled them, still peering at him.

"His son," piped the creature shambling in the doorway. "'Tis his son! He would not have sent him away, and yet he would not prevent it—now how could that be?" Mr Hare turned his bright, watery eyes from one to the other; he seemed to wait for a reply; and then all sentience faded from his face, and he drooped listless against the wall.

Mr Brand stood close beside his son, gripping his arm, and glowering upon Mr Hare.

"Now how could he tell that?" he said,

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speaking low. "It is true—I make no shame to acknowledge it." He drew Martin into the window, and set his lips to his son's ear. "He hath a devil, like what we read of in the Book," whispered the Parson.

"Not he," said Martin, loudly. "Why, Mr Hare, Mr Hare, don't you know me?"

The poor wretch lifted his eyes for a moment, then dropped them again, and sidled across the room to Parson Brand.

"So it is ever," said the Parson. "He cleaves to me like a child to its nurse. I can do nothing, day or night, but tend him, poor soul. Look at this!" Mr Brand pointed to the room about him.

"Why, sir, we'll soon set the place ship-shape," returned Martin. He forced open a casement, and was about to attack the squalid litter upon the table, when Mr Brand stopped him.

"Avast!—What am I saying?— Stay, Martin. You have not told me how you came here. Why did you return?" demanded the Parson, with a sudden return to his accustomed asperity.

"Time enough, sir, after working hours," replied Martin, with a glance at Mr Hare, who was leaning out of the open casement.

The Parson hesitated a moment, then laid

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his hand upon Mr Hare's shoulder. Mr Hare drew in his head, and stood up.

"It's hot. Hot!" said he. "I saw the lightning dance above the plains of hell. There's death in the air—I smell death. Why? Is it because the graveyard's yonder? And what is death? I forget what you said."

"The greatest gift of life," said the Parson. He shook his head at Martin. "Any reply will serve, but I try to answer truly"—a smile glimmered on his stern face.

Mr Brand coaxed his patient from the room, and Martin set to work to clean the house down. All the afternoon he toiled in the gasping heat, stripped to shirt and trousers. Just such heat, and just such a task, had he known when off the Guinea Coast as a boy; and it stuck in Martin's head that he was working a slave ship, homeward-bound.

All the afternoon, the Parson talked to Mr Hare, and soothed him, and read to him, and persuaded him to eat; while the lightning shivered in the windows, and the thunder rolled in the distance.

The dusk gathered early, and Martin set lights in every window, both to dissipate the gloom of the place, and as a mark of defiance to the insurgent villagers. He cooked a meal, washed the dishes, and set all in order; and

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Mr Hare, relieved by the cheerful illumination and the stir, sat quiet before the kitchen fire, and seemed to sleep.

Parson Brand motioned his son into his room across the passage, and the two men sat down facing each other, each silently filling a long pipe. The thunder still growled without; and on the back of it there came a distant sound of wild singing, and the beating of metal upon metal.

"The corroborree is beginning," observed Martin; but the Parson took no heed.

"My son," he began, "we are to have plain dealing, are we not? Well. Then I will afford you a plain account of what I have done with regard to yourself. Will you do as much by me?"

"Why, sir, you are very good," replied Martin, "and so I will, in so far as I have the power. But there is part of my story concerns others, and I am pledged to secrecy. The promise covers nothing to our purpose; it concerns Sir Anthony and another—thus much I may tell you."

The Parson looked blackly on the floor, his hand on his knee, holding his pipe.

"Well," he said at length, "I believe you have told me no lie, since you came to years of discretion. So be it."

Then, with unsparing accuracy of detail,

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he related to Martin the story of his visit to Sabrina, and of his conversation with Sir Anthony, on the preceding Monday.

Beneath that dry recital, Martin could not but detect the fervent human affection of the grim old gentleman, warring with the bitter requirements of his faith; and Martin regarded his father with a new impulse of kindness and respect.

The while the Parson talked, the distant clamour of the village rose and fell, amid the mutterings of the storm. And when the old man had done, Martin told his own story faithfully, within the limits he had prescribed, extenuating nothing; so that Parson Brand presently learned how his son, whom he had vowed to the service of the Lord, had gambled at cards the night through. The remembrance of his own wild youth rose up before him as he listened, and mocked him.

"The sum is nothing," he said, sombrely. "I make nothing of the money. It is not that—I would it were. No, no. It is that I see the whole work of my life frustrate, and poured out like water upon sand. If you, my son, could do this thing, then I have lived wholly in vain. God hath forgotten me."

Martin replied nothing. He had disburdened his conscience and he was content, since the

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money was apparently secure. He was thus prepared to face with equanimity what might follow.

Mr Brand rose, and went from the room, and looked into the kitchen. Mr Hare still dozed before the fire. The Parson returned to his room and shut the door, and set to pacing to and fro. "It may be," he broke out, at length, stopping in his walk, "that the fault is mine—that I have kept back part of the price. There is a thing I have not told you." He stared upon his son in such evident and desperate distress that Martin was moved to the heart.

"Dear sir," said he, "I have done wrong, since I have troubled you. Tell me nothing if it pains you. I will forswear the cards, and you may rest easy."

"Ay, ay," said the old man, his eyes glowing, "that is to please me, and I thank you for it. But it is not to go to the root of the matter. No, no. I will risk no more, nor shall you retain a shred of excuse. Hearken."

And standing where he was in the light of the candles, his hand on the table, or raised in air, Parson Brand began to speak; and he had scarce begun, when Martin let his pipe break upon the floor, and listened, despite the increasing tumult without, motionless and open-mouthed. For Parson Brand told the story of his last voyage.

CHAPTER III

THE LAST VOYAGE

"**D**O you remember the day I came home from my last voyage, with the negro Robin John carrying my gear? Ay, ay, you were a little boy then, but you will remember. We had cleared from Old Calabar with a cargo of three hundred and fifteen negroes, men, women, and children, all in health and fat, to sell in the West Indies. I thought myself to be high in the favour of the Lord; for profit of the cargo would make up my private fortune to the sum I had fixed upon to gain, before I left the sea. I had long promised your dear mother to leave that way of life; every cruise was to be my last; and then, God wearied of my procrastination, and sent His judgment upon me. We had scarce entered upon the Middle Passage, when first one negro and then another sickened with ophthalmia and went stone blind. At first I had them tended; but the disease spread like fire in straw, and soon the

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greater number were blind and helpless. Then we began to throw them overboard by night to save the rest from infection. . . . You know, my son, the underwriters insure against loss by jettison—they pay computed value for every negro lost overboard at sea. And I hoped to save the rest. But the crew was infected, and day by day one and another went blind. Foul weather set in, with contrary winds, and I had scarce hands enough to work the ship, watch and watch on, and never a man to spare to herd the slaves. Had I battened down, every soul would have perished in three days, suffocated. . . . Was ever poor sinner in so dreadful a dilemma?" The parson paused, and wiped the fine sweat from his forehead. Without, the beating of trays and kettles and the shouting, drew momentarily nearer. "Now see, my son, how God dealt with me, because I would not follow what I knew to be the right. Ay, once and again when your mother pled with me—even as I pled with you but now—I hardened my heart, and said, Where is the evil? And in due time God terribly showed me what I did. For, see now, I had my duty to do by the owners—I was bound to get value for their money; I was bound to save the ship if I could. Three hundred and fifteen slaves—and the slave of slaves was

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Captain Brand. Three hundred and fifteen save one—three hundred and fifteen poor lost souls save one, men and women and little crying children. . . . We lay to in the middle watch under a single tops'l, the ship rolling scuppers under, and we opened a gangway in the bulwarks, and drove them overboard in gangs, chained two by two in the dark. . . . Three hundred and fifteen, save one. Ay," said the Parson, "Robin John alone escaped the disease; that poor black and I, the Captain, escaped, and every soul of the crew was crawling about the deck, blind. We two worked the ship, beating to windward day after day, and made shift to serve the rations; and we two brought her right alongside Bridgetown quay in Barbados."

The Parson paused, and Martin's face kindled with admiration, staring upon his father. Neither heeded the singing and calling of the crowd which had gathered at the garden gate.

"And so I came home," continued Mr Brand, steadily, raising his voice somewhat, because of the noise without. "And day and night, as I paced the deck, I beheld the blind faces and clutching hands sinking beneath the waves; and when I lay in my cot, their cries rang in my ears. Three hundred and fifteen

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save one,—three hundred and fifteen ! But my punishment was not yet fulfilled ; the cup of God's wrath was not emptied ; and I must drink it to the dregs. As I came to the door of my home, I required an oath of the negro, and swore him upon the cross-hilt of my knife to keep silence. For I knew that if your mother learned that history, it would surely mean her death. And I had deaths enough upon my soul—deaths enough."

From this point, Martin's own remembrances fitted, piece by piece, into the story, as the old man went doggedly on.

" I fell ill—how, I never knew—but ill I was, and lost all sense ; and when I came to myself, they told me that my wife was dead, and I arose and followed her to the grave. Then I came home and sat in my place, and reasoned within myself. And when I knew what I should do, I sent for the doctor, and questioned him. I asked him of what your mother died. Some shock, said he—ay, some shock. Was it my sickness ? Partly, said he, but he thought there was more—something she had been told, so he conjectured from some words she had let fall. Then I had what I required, and I called for Robin John. He lied—but he could not deceive me. Your mother had told him I was dead—as indeed she believed

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—and so dealt with the negro (who is but a child, like all negroes, and eager to tell a story) that he told her all. Then," said Parson Brand, very deliberately, "I kept the oath we had sworn between us, on the knife, and I took the knife, and I cut out his tongue and sent him to be sold. Ay, and if it were to do again, I would do it again, and the Lord should cleanse me of the blood as He did aforetime," added the fierce old man, and stopped on the word.

He stood in the candlelight, his eyes pin points beneath his bristling eyebrows, his beard trembling with the working of his mouth, and (Martin thought) even his thick white hair was stirred upon his head, as by a wind. Martin beheld that indomitable figure standing like a rock between himself and all that he desired; as the tall rock of Teneriffe casts its shadow upon a hundred miles of sea. But the same blood ran in his own veins. Parson Brand's dreadful history moved him to pity and admiration and horror; but, to no shadow of turning.

"My son," said Parson Brand, "I have told you what I never thought to tell to living creature. I have told you all—ay, every jot. . . . Will you not renounce this woman and return to God?"

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It had come, then, the supreme moment. Desperately, Martin tried to think, to calculate, but his brain swung giddily, and all resource eluded him. To refuse, was to strike the poor old man his father to the heart; to accept, was merely impossible. His father's eyes burned upon him. There was a wire-drawn silence. The noise without had fallen to low talking, with a crackle of flames; and both men had wholly forgotten the crowd that thickened about the house. Martin tried to speak, and with an incoherent sound, got suddenly to his feet.

A bright light flamed upon the window, there came an outburst of shouts and calls and a singing of ribald snatches, to the maddening clatter of beaten metal. A stone crashed through the window, and the broken glass tinkled on the floor. Martin swore aloud.

"I'll teach them! Stay you here, dear sir." He touched the old man's square shoulder, as he passed him. Parson Brand, standing where he was, turned his head to look after his son, his rugged face all softened and smiling, at that mute caress.

Martin ran upstairs to his room, took down his gun, and was ramming down a double charge of buckshot, when he heard his

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father's great voice shouting below, and turned cold where he stood. For it was the old cry of his slaving days that rang above the tumult of the rioters. "Below! Below there! Pipe all niggers below! Down, dog, down!"

Martin took the stairs at a leap, and burst into the room beneath. A slippery black figure dodged past him, wrenching the gun from his hands, and was gone. Martin caught a glimpse of the glaring face under the white wool, the cavernous mouth, and the gleam of a silver collar, as the creature dived under his arm. It was Sir Anthony's dumb negro. Before Martin could spring after him, Mr Hare was clinging about his legs, moaning and chattering.

Parson Brand stood upright beside his desk, still and grave; and behind his head, a long knife quivered in the painted face of the savage idol against the wall.

"Ay, ay, 'tis Robin John," said Mr Brand, quietly. "I thought my old black shipmate had come to deliver me at last, and lo! he hath failed, and I must live on and beat to windward ever. O God, have a little pity on me!"

"Why, sir," cried Martin, totally uncomprehending, as, with a firm hand on Mr

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Hare's collar, he tried to free himself, "the brute would have killed you—and thank God, you are safe!"

There came a shattering explosion, a bursting flash of fire, and the room was filled with a choking reek of sulphur and a thick smoke.

Through that veil Martin saw a red smear that fell from view as two arms were thrown up and dropped; and the next moment he was kneeling beside the body of his father, shot through face and head.

Martin looked up, and his eyes met the bright eyes of Mr Hare, who touched the body with a timid finger, and withdrew it.

"What is this? Is this death?" asked Mr Hare, eagerly. "The first death? Is it the first death? Why, that's deliverance!"

"Ay," said Martin, not knowing what he said, "deliverance."

"Why, then, God hath delivered me from John Brand! Oh, Molly will be pleased. Where is Molly? I want Molly to take me home." And the creature withdrew into a corner, and wept.

Without, in the dead silence, the flames crackled about the grotesque effigy of Parson Brand, and a hurry of footsteps beat upon the road, and grew fainter and died away. Then a broad sheet of flame winked in the

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room, and the thunder crashed overhead, and rumbled farther and yet more afar; and all was drowned in a flood of rain. Martin turned to the window, and looked sombrely forth. The fire hissed under the lash of the water, and the foolish effigy sprawled face downwards on the blackening embers. So he stood, stunned and incapable of thought; until the rain slackened, and a star shone forth beyond the dark trees. Something plucked at his elbow. Mr Hare stood beside him, quiet and composed, the madness gone from his face, and in its stead, the look of one released. "I will go home, Mr Martin," said he; "you will like to be alone."

"Ay, ay," said Martin, looking at him, and wondering to perceive in his own heart, even then, the reflection of Mr Hare's immense relief. "That will be kind of you. I have much to do."

There sounded a timid knocking at the outer door. Mr Hare shrank back. "Is that the black man again? I hope it is not the black man. I let him in once, because he made signs that he was afraid of the crowd outside—and I was afraid, too. But I hope he won't come again."

"No, never again," said Martin. He took

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Mr Hare by the arm, and led him forth. Mrs Sylvester was trembling on the threshold, and with her stood Sabrina. A sound of wheels approaching rose upon the air.

"Take Mrs Sylvester home, Mr Hare," said Martin, and sent the pair away.

Lights shone and smoked at the gate, as a carriage drew up; and Martin, with Sabrina clinging to his arm, went down the garden path towards the gate. In that moment, Martin was aware of a singular sensation, as though, when he stepped into the cool night air, with Sabrina beside him, they entered a new world. Sir Anthony met them at the gate.

THE MAN FROM HELGOLAND

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IN the year of our Lord eight hundred and ninety, Alfred King of the Saxons (having lived down the little historical mishaps of his youth) was chiefly occupied in chasing the Danish army hither and thither in his wild realm. For the Danes held to a solid conviction that England should be theirs ; and every Saxon knew the Northman for his natural foe. And so, when the thralls of Athelstane, King of East Anglia, herding swine in the oak woods about St Osyth, beheld a longship creeping in from the sea, they left their pigs to grub for acorns in the snow, and ran to Colchester with the news.

You are to picture the long beaked ship gliding up the grey arm of the sea in the falling dusk of a midwinter afternoon, the plash of the banked oars and the creak of the rowlocks breaking the dead hush ; gliding so between narrowing shores, where the oak woods gloomed solemn as a cathedral, floored with

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glimmering white ; here and there a heron taking flight with a hoarse cry, his great wings and clumsy drooping legs graven upon the close-drawn curtain of the sky ; a single steel-capped figure standing immobile at the prow of the ship ; another figure astern, wielding the long steering oar. In such a manner came our first masters after the Romans. They beached the ship at the head of the Estuary, and twenty men took axe and targe and leaped ashore. The short broad man who had stood in the prow, formed his men into a wedge, or triangle, himself the apex ; and so they marched forward along the river-bank towards Colchester town. Such were the wedges being driven into England then, till the whole realm was riven ; in good time, they were to rive and crack asunder the world. There was no nation under heaven could withstand the Danish wedge, cleaving its way with the broad axe.

The dark thickened, and where the river lost itself in the gloom, a yellow glow shone in the sky, the glow of a lighted town. A bell tolled faintly. The strangers from the ship were aware of a body of men approaching orderly along the beaten track beside the river. A voice called to them to stand. But the leader of the shipmen made as though he had not heard ; and the wedge pressed through

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an armed throng of Saxons, as a snow plough churns through the snow ; wheeled at a word, and halted.

A round figure clad in furs came nose to nose with the leader of the Danishmen, and demanded who he was, and whence he came, and on what business.

"King's business—simply that," returned the Dane, soothingly. "Will you take me in to King Gothrun, compeer—for I see you are a man having authority?"

"I know no King Gothrun," said the round man in the furs. "King Athelstane rules East Anglia. I am his ealdorman. Ethered is my name."

"Gothrun or Athelstane, all's one to me," said the Dane. "Let us march, ealdorman."

"The King's a-dying," said Ethered. "There sounds his passing bell. No man sees him save the priest."

"I shall speed him on his way, better than any priest," said the Dane, calmly. "Lead on, Ethered."

The stout little Saxon breathed heavily, but he made no movement. The creak and rustle of the men's accoutrements sounded in the dark. The bell tolled.

"Come you from Hasten the Dane?" said

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the ealdorman at last, the words coming with an effort, like a cork from a bottle.

"And if I did," returned the Dane, wondering what this might mean, and resolved to make the most of it, "and if I did, ealdorman, I do not think the viking of whom you speak would admire to have his name cried aloud in a Saxon land. I wonder at you, ealdorman. You must speak other-gates, compeer, if we are to discuss. As for me, I am Othere of Helgoland."

"Othere?—Othere?—I know you not," said Ethered, uneasily. "But I have got a message for him of whom you speak, Othere—a message from the King."

"Speak it then," said Othere, shortly.

The ealdorman looked at Othere, and looked up at the sky, and down at his feet shuffling in the snow, and twisted his fingers together, the image of irresolution.

"Come, come, ealdorman, despatch," said Othere. "My men are fresh from the sea, and the presence of Saxons is apt to excite them."

The little ealdorman straightened himself and spoke, with a repetition of his former effort.

"The landing is at Purfleet on the Thames River," said he.

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"Is that the message? Very right and commodious," said Othere. "Sure, Hasten will be pleased. And now, compeer, take me in to the King."

Ethered fell back a step. "Why, you have naught to do with the King—you have his message—he is dying," babbled the ealdorman.

"I declare to you, ealdorman, that if you are in the mind for a broil, you are in the very way to enjoy it," quoth Othere loudly. "You shall lead the way to the King's stead-ing, or by the Three Gods of Vanaheim, I will pave the road with gobbets of your flesh, ealdorman—which you please."

The massed men at his back closed together with an ominous ringing of steel. "Aoi!" said the Northmen softly, as the Saxons pressed forward upon the heels of their ealdorman. But that worthy chieftain had no mind to fling away a life which even then seemed to promise a great enlargement. At the same time he was in a bitter difficulty.

For, whether this imperious viking had been sent from Hasten or no, Ethered had fatally committed himself in giving the Dane that message. It would never do for the King to hear of it, dying though he was. And yet the chance had been too valuable to neglect.

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But Ethered found he had small choice in the matter; for Othere the viking took him by the arm with a gripe that gave him pain, and marched him forward. "Tell your men to go in front," said Othere, and Ethered did so.

"Swear to me, then, that you came in peace," said Ethered, weakly.

"By the Twelve Gods of Asgard, I am friend to Gothrun," returned Othere. "Let us march a little quicker, friend Ethered."

"You swear by false gods," panted the ealdorman, dragged along the slippery track. "Pledge me your word, viking."

"Anything to ease your mind, ealdorman—I pledge it," said Othere, pleasantly. "Though I know not why you should call my gods false. I would rather pray to Tyr the son of Odin in the day of battle, than to the White Christ, who never handled weapon in His life, that I can hear. What say you, ealdorman?"

"I say that I will not be burst with walking—and that if you talk thus in the chamber of King Athelstane, baptised Christian and godson of the Lord Alfred, you had better beware of the priest, viking," said the fat man, irritably, hanging back and trying to slacken his pace.

"I see you know the world, compeer," said Othere. "Now we poor shipmen are the prey

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of the crafty all the world over. We who are lords of the sea, leagued with the Three Gods of Vanaheim—let us but touch the shore, and a child can lead us. And as you say, a priest shall make us afraid.”

“You are then no pirate—no seeker for new lands? You are but a shipman?” asked the ealdorman, with some reviving hope.

“Just that,” said Othere. “The Danes my kinsmen seek land and women and gold. I seek the Unknown. I am Othere the voyager, Othere the sea-eagle, who takes his flight where none else hath been. . . . Faster, ealdorman.”

The ealdorman, somewhat reassured, had scant breath for further conversation. The boding knell rang louder as they drew near the town of Colchester. Down the wide street Danes and Saxons marched in two bodies, side by side, between the dim rows of wattled houses, specked here and there with lights, to the palisade of the King’s steading. Torches, their flames burning upright in the windless air, splashed a vivid light upon the bearded faces and bright weapons of the men who stood in groups about the forecourt. A deep sound of chanting rose from within the house; from out the dark, the bell tolled. Seeing the ealdorman, the Saxon men-at-arms

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made way. Ethered would have entered first, but Othere stepped in front of him, and together the man from Helgoland and the ealdorman came in to the King, and Othere's men closed about the door without.

A fire of logs glowed in the centre of the wide room; and two great light eyes shone from a bundle of furs, that was set in a chair beside the red embers. King Athelstane of East Anglia was looking his old acquaintance, Death, in the face for the last time. Beside him stood a priest, gowned to the feet, the gold of the stiff embroidered chasuble gleaming in the firelight. He was a tall man, lusty and black-haired, and his cheeks creased about his eyes as he bent his glance upon the intruders.

Othere stepped swiftly and lightly to the King, and stood, resting the point of his broad axe on the rush-strewn floor, and looking down into the eyes of the great figure shrunk within its furs.

"Old friend," said Othere, "are you indeed for the dark voyage?"

The old King, with a mighty effort, heaved himself upright, and spoke, quavering and deep-toned.

"Othere—Othere—have the gods sent thee? The sons of Muspel ring me in—I cannot win

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through, and—and I have a word for thee, Othere."

Painfully he turned his wild eyes upon the ealdorman, standing a little withdrawn, and upon the priest at his right hand. "Go," said the King. "Go out."

Ethered hung irresolute, but Othere faced round upon him, and the ealdorman melted away and closed the door. The priest stood immobile, like a great doll.

King Gothrun dragged a gaunt shaking hand from out his furs, and pointed to the man of God.

"See there," said he, his tremulous voice rising and falling like the wind. "Look at him. The White Christ has his foot on the old wolf's neck."

Othere turned upon the priest, and his teeth gleamed in his red beard.

"Did you hear, priest? Out, bald-pate!"

"I am Christ's Vicar, not the King's, and I abide," returned the clergyman, visibly blenching, but standing his ground. "Heathen and blasphemer, I adjure——"

He would have sprung back, but he was too late. Othere's hand griped his throat, Othere's knee dug into the small of his sacred back. There was a noise as of one who strangled, there was a rustle of garments and a stamping.

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The old King, a light in his grey face, strove hard to peer round the high back of his chair. There came a muffled sound, as of something brittle snapped within a soft covering. Then, silence. Othere stepped into the firelight, wiping his hands on his leggings.

"Hast slain him? Is the dog dead?" The Christian King, godson of King Alfred, his lips drawn back in a savage grin, stared joyfully upon the viking.

"He was not afraid, and perhaps Odin will receive him after all," answered Othere. He held a cup of wine to the King's lips. Gothrun drank deeply.

"Aoi!" cried the old warrior, huskily. "Aoi! Skall to the viking! Now will I wend to Valhalla, to the gods of my fathers. He—they—would not let me go, Othere—the White Christ had me in a net. Now shall I wend to the hall of heroes . . . but swift—" his high, wavering tones dropped, and he spoke straight on. "Swiftly I go, Othere, and swift must you speed, for thou hast slain a priest. Hearken to me, and swear by Odin and the Twelve Gods to fulfil my word."

Othere swore, and bent his ear to the King's failing utterance.

"Take my daughter Elfwina to Alfred the King in London—charge him to choose her a

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man—Ethered the ealdorman would marry her and so gain rule over East Anglia—he is a false dog. . . . He conspires with Hasten the Dane to rebel against the Lord Alfred. . . . Hasten will come with eighty longships—he told me of his sailing—when you entered, I thought 'twas he—and if Hasten can take the kingdom, let him, I say. . . . But I will have no Saxon dog to rebel. . . . See to it, Othere. . . . Now slay me with the axe lest the priests come back—to catch my soul when you are gone. . . . Strike deep.”

The shaggy head fell back, and wide eyes stared unwinking at the light eyes of the little sailor, whose broad blade gave back a crimson gleam in the firelight. Othere heaved up the weapon, so that it whistled about his head, and checked his hand. The dying man frowned, being too far sped for speech. Again Othere swung the axe, and again checked his hand. Then the light went out of the King's eyes, and his jaw fell. Othere held the blade to the mouth, but no stain dimmed the surface.

The fire muttered in the dead hush; without, the bell tolled, and the sound of chanting rose and fell. Othere stepped lightly to the door and shot the heavy wooden bars into their sockets. Then he made a circuit of the

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walls ; pushed aside a curtain, and came face to face with a tall maiden, standing in the firelight. Othere observed with approval the noble and stern figure, and the sea-blue eyes challenging him.

"Who is it?" said Elfwina.

"Princess," said Othere, earnestly, "the King your father is by with it—he has gone to his fathers and yours. I am Othere out of Helgoland. I am come to take you away, lest Ethered the ealdorman should have you. Gothrun told me to do this. We must go hence swiftly."

"I know. I heard all," said Elfwina, to Othere's great relief. "Wait for me." With a motion of her hand, she passed beyond the curtain into the chamber of death. Othere, waiting, heard the voices of women talking in the room beyond, and the more distant sound of chanting, and the strokes of the bell that knocked upon the heart. The princess lifted the curtain, and Othere beheld her pale, sad face set with resolve, and admired her courage. He caught up an armful of furs, and took her hand. So they hung for a moment, Elfwina searching the honest red face of the viking, as though to find assurance. Then her fingers tightened on his rough hand, and together they passed through the women's rooms and

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out upon the trodden snow of the courtyard, where a postern door opened in the stockade. None guarded it, for the land was at peace.

Othere drew a horn from his tunic, and wound a call of a strange melody upon it, once and again. A moment, and there came a trampling of feet, and Othere's men came running round the corner of the outbuildings; the next, the whole body, with Elfwina in the midst, was marching swiftly across the open land without the town, towards the river. As they ran, a distant and confused clamour broke out behind them; and they knew that the Saxons would be following hard after them. But they had boarded the longship, and were shoving her into the stream, when a body of men came running to the water's edge, and halted. A voice rang through the dark, volleying scarce intelligible menaces. When it ceased for a moment, Othere hailed the shore, with gibes that cannot be recorded; for it was a rough-tongued age. Then they hoisted the great square sail, and by morning light they were sweeping southward.

Early the next morning Othere tied up his longship to a bollard where is now Westminster Bridge, and with his men at his back, carried Elfwina to the King's steading, that stood a bowshot from the river. The Queen's

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women took the princess, and Othere went in to King Alfred the Wise.

Alfred was of short stature, grey-bearded, narrow-eyed, with the intent expression of one who ever ponders grave matters gravely. Othere stood before him, high-coloured, red-bearded, and serene, and the two considered each other. The viking stared full-eyed, wholly unabashed; the King dwelt solemnly upon the Northman, as though he were a piece of writing to be deciphered. Presently Alfred began to question Othere, in his quiet magisterial way.

Othere, suspecting that Ethered the ealdorman might arrive at any moment, told the King all that had befallen, save the ealdorman's message to Hasten the Dane, and King Gothrun's word of Hasten's sailing. These things he held in reserve.

"Still," said Alfred, whose eyes never left the light bright eyes of the viking, "still, I do not understand for what purpose you came to Athelstane."

"Gothrun, whom you call Athelstane, was an old compeer of mine—and I had a mind to wive his daughter. For women are scarce in Helgoland, and Elfwina comes of a good stock," said Othere, simply.

"The princess is Christian. Are you baptised, viking?"

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"None has tried to baptise me as yet," said Othere. "I was bred to the faith of my fathers; and still the Gods of Vanaheim rule the sea. And we of Helgoland are ever voyaging."

"Where is this Helgoland?" asked the King, with a sudden quickening of interest. He opened a small book, and took pen in hand, and looked expectantly upon the sailor.

"Helgoland is an isle of barren rock, lying in the midst of the ocean, farther north than any other Northman's land. We have but few cattle and small tillage, and draw our wealth from the Finns who dwell along the desert coasts to the north-eastward. They pay us tribute of skins of beasts, birds' feathers, whales' bones, and cables and tacklings of whales' skins."

"Are there yet more lands to the northward?" The King wrote busily, and Othere marvelled that he should apparently forget the viking's late exploits, in a tale of common things. The book Othere supposed to be a kind of magic.

"Once," said Othere, "I steered northward from Helgoland for three days, having upon my steerboard, or right hand, the desert country, and the main ocean upon my leereboard. Here the sun goes round in ring, and

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there is no night. So far north sail the whale hunters; but I held on my course for other three days, and the land turned eastward, and eastward I sailed for four days more. Then the land turned southward, and for five days I sailed southward until I came to the mouth of a mighty river. Here was the country of the Finns, the Terfinns, and the Biarmes—a country of much tribute. Here also are the horse-whales in vast herds, whose teeth-bones are of great price and excellency, and whose skin is fit for cables and tackling for ships."

"What beast is a horse-whale?" asked the King, very gravely.

"A beast of the sea, having seven ells in length," said Othere. "Here is his tooth-bone." He drew from his breast his ivory horn, carved all over with runes, and gave it to the King.

"It is a magic horn," said Othere. "I took it from a Lapp, who was a witch, and whom I therefore slew. I do not know how it is magic. But if I were to set it to my lips and blow, all those my men who heard that blast would break down wall and door and hew their way to me. So it is magic enough for me."

Alfred examined the horn minutely, with his usual air of conning a difficult task.

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"If it be magic, it is of the devil," said he.

"That is why I would not offer it as a gift to a Christian King," said Othere, and took the horn again; for he saw no reason why kings should expect to have everything for nothing.

"The gift I chiefly prize is the truth. It is rarer than rubies," said Alfred, solemnly.

"I have told you the truth. Will you hold me scatheless," said Othere, the priest's death sticking in his mind.

"You are in my house, viking," said the King, writing busily in his book. "You are free to stay or to cut sail."

"I should be loth to go, and leave that for which I came," returned Othere.

"The princess," said the King, without looking up from his writing, "is Christian. She cannot wed a heathen. I said so before."

"We are alone, O King," answered Othere, cheerfully. "There is none to carry our talk. This Christian religion—is it not as a white robe to be put on and off at need, as a man puts on his furs against the cold, and doffs them when the sun shines. . . . The sun shines at times in Helgoland."

"It is a life to be lived," said the King, still writing.

"Ay, but the gods made the world first,

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and a man's life therein, and the White Christ came afterwards," said Othere. "It is a pity to cleave the world in two."

"And yet," said the King, absently, as he wrote, "you slew the priest."

"Because he was disobedient, not because he was a priest. And I took no weapon to him," answered the viking. "And as for the princess, had she a mind to marry the fat ealdorman, she would not have come with me of her own will."

The King laid down his pen and raised his head.

"Northman," said he, "it seems you have dealt truly with me and with my godson Athelstane, and I will so deal with you. Did I refuse to wed the princess to this Ethered, he would make the thing a pretext to raise East Anglia and Northumbria upon me."

"And if the wench is to be sold for advantage, King," answered Othere, bluntly, "which will profit you most? To take the price in oaths he will not keep, of a gross hilding such as this ealdorman, or of Othere the sea-eagle, who has his eyrie in Helgoland, midway betwixt England and Daneland? Of Othere, who can carry to you tidings of the coming of the longships, and levy tribute upon the tribes of the midnight sun? Of Othere, King, who

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could have stolen the princess, had he so desired?"

The little grey King heard in silence, and brooded and brooded upon the keen and cheerful countenance of the man from Helgoland. And presently, behind the downright propositions of the Northman, the King beheld the splendid shadow of a great Idea; the dim, heroic outlines, like a vast crag heaving upon the sunrise, of a scheme of sea-borne traffic with far countries, a river of wealth pouring into his havens, untouched by the internecine wars that continually wasted his realm. He saw, too, a fleet of armed ships that should hold his coasts secure, by destroying the Northman's navies before they could land their men. . . .

There entered a big, fair bearded man to tell the King that Ethered the ealdorman had even then arrived hot-foot, bearing dire news, and craving to speak instantly with the King.

"Bid him to the council," said Alfred, and as the man went out he turned to Othere. "What proof have I that you can give me these tidings of the sailing of the Northmen? They are of your kin, viking."

"And Ethered the ealdorman is yours," said Othere, boldly. "Hasten the Dane hath eighty ships in the Thames, or will

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have to-day or to-morrow, and Ethered gave me a message to him, that he should land at Purfleet. I did not see Hasten, but Gothrun told me of his coming. And he will come."

Alfred the King shut his book and stood up. "Why did you not tell me so at first, Northman," said he, sternly.

"There is an order to be observed in all things," said Othere gravely. "I am a free man, Alfred King of the Saxons. I am Othere of Helgoland."

The King stood beside his table, staring at the veined oak. Here was a new and forcible argument that he should bind Ethered to him. If he failed, there would be a great war. The huge guerilla army of the Danes, which ever harried England, was even now occupying Alfred's men in the west. The King was sorry for Elfwina, and he liked Othere, and would have been glad to make of him a friend. A hard pressed monarch must needs catch at whatever stray locks my Lady Occasion chooses to wave in the wind. . . . Meanwhile, the council waited for the King. Alfred bade Othere to remain in the steading as his guest, and went directly to the council-chamber.

Othere whistled a tune between his teeth,

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and considered the situation; but he could come to no plan. He went into the great hall, and mightily ate and drank; gave orders to his men that they should keep reasonably sober, and that they were to abide within earshot of the steading. Then he went to find the Princess Elfwina.

He found her alone in an upper room. The winter sun shone warm upon the rush-strewn floor, and the eager air came sweetly in at the unglazed window, blown across leagues of snowy forest and frozen marsh-land. Elfwina, still and pale, sat upon a couch, leaning against the fur-hung wall.

"Princess, the ealdorman is here. Are you for another flight?" said Othere. And he told her of his talk with the King: omitting, however, his own request for her. Before he had done, the princess was sitting upright, her languor gone, a spot of red on either cheek.

"I will get me to a nunnery," said she.

"That would be a very sad waste," said Othere. "Now I will carry you where you will, King or no King."

He took out the magic horn, and gave it to Elfwina.

"That will call Othere and Othere's men through steel and stone," said he.

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Elfwina fingered the runes, and set the mouthpiece to her lips. "What is the call?"

Othere sounded it low, and the princess practised the melody until she had it by heart. Othere sat studying her beauty; the thick gold hair, combed back from a broad forehead, modelled a little forward at the level brows; the eyes hued like a cup of a wave of the sea, holding the blue; the ample verge of the hips, the deep bosom, the large limbs. Othere thought her most desirable; but he sat still and said no word.

A messenger entered, summoning Elfwina to the council.

"What will you do, princess?" said Othere,

"I will go," said she. "I will see what they will do."

The messenger led her through an ante-chamber where was a guard of armed men, and into the council-chamber, a long, low room, open to the raftered roof of wattle and thatch.

The King sat at the head of the table, facing the door. He looked very small in his high-backed chair. On either hand were seated Plegmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, Elstan Bishop of London, Swithulf the fighting bishop of Rochester, Ceolmund ealdorman of Kent, Bertulf ealdorman of Essex, Wulfred ealdor-

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man of Hampshire, and Eadulf the King's horse-thane. Ethered the ealdorman sat at the lower end of the table. His round face was of a mottled colour, and wore a strained aspect, as of one who was enduring a heavy stress. His furs were clotted with mud from head to heel. He rose jauntily and led Elfwina to the foot of the table, and stood beside her.

Then arose Plegmund the Archbishop, with his long white beard, his tiny and dark eyes, his skull face, and addressed the princess. The venerable prelate used many long words, and introduced tedious Scriptural parentheses into his speech; but the gist of it was that the King had been pleased to bestow the hand of Elfwina, daughter of his godson, King Athelstane (now with God), upon his faithful ealdorman, Ethered.

"I thank your Grace, and the King's kindness, but I have no will to marry," said Elfwina, speaking very clearly.

The archbishop weightily informed her that the objection had no bearing on the case.

"Why then, I will get me into a nunnery," said Elfwina.

The little grey King, watching her, slightly shook his head. Plegmund told her that her request could not be considered. There were

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reasons of state, treaties to be respected, and the King's will was for her welfare, and so forth.

"I was born free. Am I to be bought and sold?" said Elfwina. "My father Athelstane committed me to the King's keeping. Are all you great clergymen and noble thanes here assembled to see a maid misdone?"

Her glance went about the council-board. The King met her eyes without the alteration of a line in his expression; which was as though he found this inter-chapter in life's long lesson-book more interesting than he had expected. Of the rest, one or two had their hands upon their mouths; others looked at the table; others regarded her with a stupid immovable gravity. The archbishop whispered to Elstan Bishop of London, and took a piece of written parchment from the table, as though to read its contents aloud.

"Ay, ay," said Elfwina, drawing back a step, her face flushing darkly. "But first of all, hearken, lords, I pray you. It is but a poor maid's fantasy, who is presently to be bartered away like a swineherding serf."

She drew an ivory horn from her mantle, and wound a strange call upon it, three times. There was a dead silence, all gazing upon her. Then the archbishop, looking down upon his

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parchment, began to read. Elfwina turned white, and stared helplessly upon the bearded figure with the skull face, whose deep slow voice filled the room with incomprehensible words which were binding her to slavery. But his Grace was again interrupted.

There came a noise of loud voices from the antechamber, a cry, a ringing clash of steel, more cries. The archbishop paused. All, save the King, who sat still and attentive, smiling to himself, started to their feet, as the door burst open, and Othere, axe on shoulder, strode into the room, and stood beside the princess. She clung to his arm.

"Guard yourselves, lords all!" cried Ethered. "This is the sea-thief—the wolf's head—he slew the priest. Guard yourselves!" He ran for the open door, but recoiled, for Othere's axemen held the threshold. He sprang at Othere, a dagger shining in his hand, but the Dane, using the flat of his axe with one hand, smote him so that he fell in a heap, and lay still. There was no time for parley. Othere swung the princess across his shoulder, and staggered out of the room. His men closed him in behind and before, and so they gained the stairway, and poured down it into the great hall; drove through the mob of fighting men, who, taken by surprise, attacked them with

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benches and knives and such weapons as they could snatch, out into the snowy field that sloped to the river. Here, they formed into the Danish wedge; and so, facing all ways, fought step by step to the water's edge; set the princess in the longship, faced about, and beat off the Saxons, and so got aboard and hoisted sail. King Alfred stood at the top of the meadow, and watched the fray, smiling; and watched the square sail dwindle and turn grey and vanish out of sight. "The viking hath left more than he hath taken away," said the King.

Then he went within and shut himself in his chamber and wrote down all these things, together with his reflections thereon, in his book; so that those who came after him should profit by his wisdom and his knowledge. (We shall see the fruit thereof in the days of King Edgar.)

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THE man looked down at the great brown beast sitting on its haunches, and the beast looked up at the man peering over the parapet of the tower. So still were they, while you could have counted ten, that the shadow of the man's head and shoulders, projecting from the square shadow of the tower, cast by the rising sun far below upon the shaven turf, wavered not a hair's breadth ; and the beast, sitting in the shade, was like the monstrous figure of a dream. Its eyes shone, with the bold stare of a human being, desperate yet shamed, entreating yet lustful ; and the man felt his inwards turn over. He dug his nails into the joints of the stonework ; for it seemed to him that he might fling himself down. Then the beast turned its head, looking to seaward ; and it was as if an invisible string snapped. The man stretched himself across the parapet, the inverted saucer of his shaven crown taking the sunlight. As he moved, the beast got to its legs, and it

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appeared to the man of the bigness of a pony. The hair bristled on its neck, as it gazed out to sea; its muzzle lifted, and it wailed and howled. At that the man was taken with an icy shudder and a sickness in the stomach, and his bare scalp shone with fine beads of sweat. With the sudden inconsequence of a dog, the beast dropped its head and trotted to the monastery door. Leaning over, the man watched it nosing at the threshold, and heard in the profound stillness the snuffling of its breath. Then, with ears cocked, it trotted round the angle of the building, and was gone.

The Abbot stood upright and wiped his brow with the lappet of his gown. "This is a thing of the Pit," said he. "This is nothing but a were-wolf, as I hope for heaven!" The Abbot of Lindisfarne had hunted wolves in plenty, when the snow drove them from the woods; but never before had he seen a beast like this beast. And in the height of summer—the thing was against nature. He quivered ever so little throughout his bulky form, and his face twitched, as his gaze wandered from the bright and solitary sea, to the huddle of thatched roofs on the foreland of Berwick, and thence to the thick hanging woods of the mainland, bosses of dense green pitted with ragged holes of shadow, and the brown cause-

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way spanning the channel, like the backbone of a sea-monster, whelmed beneath the creaming sway of the falling tide: all still and deserted in the primal hour, clean as if new-created.

Ere sunrise that morning Abbot Oskytel had climbed to the tower roof, there to fulfil his daily task of meditation. In what that exercise consisted, we need not curiously inquire. If a clergyman were not actually asleep, it was but common charity to suppose that he was engaged in such contemplation as the Rule demanded. Enough that Oskytel was a man of both zeal and ambition; he desired the office of a bishop, the which (as we know) is to desire a good work. But the times offered scanty occasion for advancement; for King Edgar, a wise and valiant prince, ruled Saxon England; his new Navy kept his coasts from the Danes; and the land was at peace. Oskytel, cast for a fighting priest—priests were men of their hands in those days—bit his nails and chafed in the peaceful solitude of Holy Island. And now, here was a portent. Oskytel, like any other abbot of his time, was stuffed full of the lore of miracle and witchcraft. He knew that were-wolves existed; how that they were men who, by means of art-magic, or collusion with the Devil,

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or by stroke of Divine judgment, were transformed, having a man's soul and a man's cunning under a wolf's pelt, and a wolf's appetite for human flesh. These things ran in his mind as he stood in the sunlight, waiting until his knees were fit to carry him. In a little while, the brethren would be going forth to fetch wood and water. They must be warned of their peril. Oskytel went round and round the descending circular stair, and his brain went round and round with his feet. As he reached the belfry, the bell swung up its gaping throat and lean tongue, like a dumb thing striving for utterance, and clanged as it swung down. The brazen tintinnabulation struck a fire in the head of the Abbot, and as it were in flying sparks, he perceived a great idea, a shining opportunity. He, Oskytel of Lindisfarne, should work a miracle. And there were more ways than one, reflected the wily priest, going round and down, of working these miracles. After all, the result was the thing.

To the assembled brethren, did the Abbot paint his prodigy. Some among them immediately declaring that they also had heard the cry of the beast, were envied of the rest, and went about that day in a state of obvious condescension towards God's duller people.

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Some of these, in their dull way, may have doubted ; but if so, they kept silence.

“And here,” said Abbot Oskytel, “is there not a lock of my Lady Occasion dangling in the air, for us to lay hold of by the help of the Saints? To save a soul alive—that were a good work. But to save a soul doubly lost, twice damned, bewitched, bound of Satan in the shape of a beast, red-fanged and defiled with the blood of man—here was a great feat, worthy of the ancient and holy house of Lindisfarne, eldest monastery of Britain.” And so forth, strongly buttressed with quarried stones from the rock of Holy Writ, according to the fashion of the time. Excellent hearing, all this ; but first one had to catch the Thing. The Abbot (practical man) was in nowise backward to face the obstacle.

None passed the doors that day, and those monks who had skill in carpentry built a stockade of stout oak poles (taken from seasoning in the roof) across the entrance of a little votive chapel, that opened from the great church. Oskytel contrived a rope-pulley-and-weight which, attached to the door opening from the chapel into the monastery garden, would close-to the door securely, were it opened from without. The chapel thus formed a trap. There remained only to bait it ; and

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the occasion (under the conditions of the case) appeared to indicate a human sacrifice. But, said the Abbot, none but he should encounter that peril; and leaving the matter to sink into the monasterial mind, Oskytel went to search the archives, in the hope of discovering a record of some like emergency.

Under date of the year 793—and the Abbot noted the ominous permutation of the figure of the current year, 973—he read that “dire forewarnings came over the land of the Northumbrians, and miserably terrified the people; there were excessive whirlwinds, and lightnings; and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air. A great famine soon followed these tokens; and a little after that, in the same year, on the 6th before the Ides of January, the ravaging of heathen men lamentably destroyed God’s church at Lindisfarne through rapine and slaughter.”

Oskytel read and was troubled. The appearance of a were-wolf was no more miraculous—if no less—than the appearance of fiery dragons, which had presaged famine and a foray of the Danes, the pirate Northmen, the dreaded heathen horde from Denmark and Norway, who, for these two hundred years, had harried England, north, south, east, and west. What, Oskytel gloomily reflected, if he

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had seen a mere vision? Why, then, there would be no miracle. That morning he had feared greatly, even to the crisping of the marrow in his bones, because he believed that what he had seen, he had seen; now he began to fear lest he hadn't. To such unfair vicissitudes was the man of God exposed. The alternative—that the beast was a common wolf—Oskytel declined to entertain.

A prey to the giddiest misgivings, the Abbot climbed the tower again, and scanned the sea-line. No sail broke its circle; nearer hand, the rocky shores were abandoned to the waves' long fall; and beneath his feet, the tilled gardens and bright fields slept deserted in the sun. That evening, Oskytel sat alone amid the thickening shadows of the church, close to the stockaded entrance to the chapel, but concealed from view of aught that entered it, by a squat stone column. Within the bars, a tethered sheep was bleating. For the Abbot had yielded with evident reluctance to the entreaties of the brethren, consenting to post himself on the safe side of the bars. For, as he argued, no animal possessed of reasonable olfactory powers, could fail to detect the presence of a man in high condition, at so short a range. So Oskytel leaned against the brown stone, and gazed through

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the bars and through the doorway beyond, that framed an oblong of twilit garden, smooth sward, and roses smouldering amid dusky foliage. Now, he warmed to the notion that he was on the way to earn the crown of a great saint, like Paul or Peter, or one of his own Saxon saints, Augustine or Deusdedit; and again, he chilled in a wave of doubt, that he was no better than a monkish fool; according as his mind shifted trim with its cargo of superstition, or as his practical intelligence redressed its balance. Thus feverishly cogitating, he fell asleep.

A sharp and heavy sound, echoing thunderously, struck him broad awake. In the shadow of the moonlit chapel, something was furiously shaking the closed door. In that moment, our bold Abbot sounded the deeps of panic terror. He would have given all he had, including his soul, for the power to run from that place; but unless you had run steel into him, he could not have lifted a finger. A freezing sweat enveloped him; he sat like a man stricken with ague. The thing in the shadow desisted from vain wrestling with clamped oak and iron. A deadly silence ensued, which was indescribably more dreadful than the noise. The Abbot thought that he would die where he sat; when a heavy footfall padded

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upon the stone, that was hardly the footfall of a beast. Oskytel flung his whole strength into a single effort ; and with clenched teeth, and stopped breath, he peered round his sheltering column.

The figure of an armed man stood full in the moon ray ; a gaunt man and tall, his ragged locks bushing out beneath a steel cap, wearing a shirt of ringed mail, an iron-scabbarded sword, and a long sheath-knife. If this were not a Northman, a sea-thief, a wolf's head (as the phrase went) it was surely his fetch. Oskytel, having seen a foray in his youth, knew well the appearance of the wild men from the North. While superstition, tracing out his spine with an icy finger, whispered that here was his fairy beast returned, perhaps for the nonce, to his original shape ; reason, with a menace no less paralysing, told him that here was a real pirate, and that if there were one, there would be an army—there would be fire and sword, rapine and robbery in Lindisfarne. Then superstition and reason joining forces, flashed upon the Abbot's whirling brain the passage in the Chronicles, which related how that aforetime a supernatural appearance had boded the ravaging of heathen men. Small wonder the poor man was fearfully bewildered. The sight of the sheep's

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carcass, and of the dark stream that trickled from a hole in the throat, winding in rivulets among the uneven flags, collecting in little pools, and stamped upon the floor in foot-prints of its slayer, bewildered him yet more, for it stuck in his head that a wolf must have torn the sheep's throat. . . .

We perceive that Oskytel was a man of courage, because at this point he mastered his terrors, and fronted the bars.

"What, a monk!" said the man within, hoarsely. "Let me out, bald - pate, man-woman, ringworm—let me out, or I will cut a hole and then carve thee, shaveling." And his blade shone in his hand.

At the voice of that rugged speech, part Norse, part Saxon, the tongue, by reason of the Danes' long traffic in England, understood by both races, the Abbot grew bold, and even angry.

"Put up your sword, heathen and wolf's head," said he, in the voice of authority his slacker monks knew. "Or I will cry aloud, and my men will tear you in pieces, for a sackless man and outfangthief."

"Oho!" said the Northman, "there would be some pretty handplay first, and a wide grave to be dug in the morning! Cry, monk, cry aloud—for out I must get, by the one road or the other."

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"Nay," said the Abbot, cautiously, "I would rather save your soul, and with it your carnal body."

"Open the door, then, swineherd," roared the Northman.

"You came in of your own will," returned the Abbot, folding his hands on his stomach.

"Why did you come?"

"That is my business, I think," growled the prisoner. "Why did you trap me like a wolf?"

"I had a wolf to catch," answered Oskytel, who began to see his way. "Who but a wolf would have walked into the snare?"

"Any viking of sense, who had been a week at sea and no fresh meat," said the Northman. "And an inch off your tongue would make a pretty morsel, monk," he added. "Let me out!"

"In good time," said Oskytel. "I mean no harm towards you, but good. Tell me, how many ships came with you?"

"Never a ship but mine," returned the prisoner, sullenly. "We came alone. How else should I be here, alone as you see? We were voyaging to the country of the Finns, and put in here for victuals. Beached the ship over yonder"—he pointed with his sword towards Berwick—"early this morning, and

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all my rowers drank themselves drunk hand to fist, and so I left them, and came over to look what I should see. So much for that, monk. Now let me out, before worse happens than the death of a sheep."

"You saw no other longships in your passage?" questioned the Abbot.

"Never a sail," said the man from the sea, stolidly.

Oskytel desperately considered the matter. If this rude heathen spoke truth—if indeed he came alone—then, whether he were man or beast, or both, the Abbot saw his miracle at least begun. But if he lied, if he were the forerunner of a pirate fleet, at any moment a ravening horde of Danes, Lapps, and Finns might rise from the dark shore and sweep out the monastery in blood and flame; and every minute the Abbot dallied there was a life sped. He knew well enough that he ought to run no such hazard—that his messengers should even then be speeding to warn the coast dwellers from Berwick to Bamborough. But to despatch them were to admit to himself and (far more important) to the brethren, that his prisoner was no marvel of transmigration, a case for miracle, but a man like other men, even a common pirate. And then, there could be no miracle. Moreover, if the alarm proved

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false, Oskytel would look a fool into the bargain. So he made his choice, just as you or I would have done, a sporting choice.

"Northman," said he, plainly, "put up that sword into its sheath, and hearken to me—nay, put it up, or by the True God I will have you hacked in pieces. That's well. Now hearken. By the same token, I cannot save you but by the one way."

"Prate away, solemn face," said the Northman, who began to reflect that he had his own reasons for spending time.

"I saw a strange beast this morning," went on the Abbot, with solemnity undisturbed. "Very early this morning, being in a certain clearness and exaltation of spirit, I beheld as it were a wolf that gazed out to sea, and lamentably howled."

"Good wolf," said the man from the sea. "As it were a friend. Friend of mine—smelt me afar off. Continue, monk."

"I read the thing otherwise," said the Abbot. "Have you forgotten? . . . There's hope, then. Ay, for I know what you were, and what you are. You tell me you landed this morning; but indeed I think the morning of your coming was very long ago, when this isle was laid waste by Northmen coming up from the sea. Then you came, and then

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you were a man, and afterwards, for what red sins I know not, you were changed. . . . As I beheld you but a few hours since, so I behold you now, but changed once more, as you stepped on holy ground."

"Is that the end of the saga?" asked the Northman, gruffly.

"Perhaps I am mistaken," said the Abbot, delicately. "You may be the common sea-thief you appear; and that, indeed, would be the end of the story—a little blood wiped from the stones, a handful of ashes scattered upon the wind—a masterless longship stove in and rotting on the beach."

"It's a wise man knows what he is, and whence he comes, the runes say," remarked the man from the sea, cautiously, for he was beginning dimly to apprehend the other's drift.

"But," continued the Abbot, his fine voice rising, "if you, poor wretchless soul, believe my word, freed you shall be; baptised; well victualled for this world, and wived if you will; and the glory of the next world laid up for you in store."

"Now you talk sense," said the man from the sea.

"Do you then believe?" said the Abbot, with indescribable majesty.

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"I should be a fool, else," said the man from the sea.

"That you were changed into the likeness of a beast, and so bound of Satan, ran savage in the woods during many years, and appeared in that shape to me, Oskytel, this day, and again in your right shape?" thundered the Abbot.

"All as you say, monk."

"That you repent?"

"That I repent."

"That you will receive baptism?"

"When?" asked the convert.

"Now," said the Abbot.

"Right so," said the man from the sea.

"Make haste, good monk."

"You will keep faith with me?"

"By the Twelve Gods of Asgard, I keep faith," said the Northman. "Swear to me, now, monk."

"By the True God, I keep faith," said Oskytel, and departed into the shadows.

The man from the sea, grinning to himself, peered between the bars of the stockade at the retreating figure of the stout Abbot. The faint yellow glow shed by the candles burning out of sight upon the altar, revealed the strong brown columns of stone, receding into monstrous blots of shadow, that immediately

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swallowed up the Abbot. The prisoner turned to the loophole that framed a strip of the night sky, gemmed with a single star, and stood with his bushy, steel-clad head on one side, listening intently. But no sound broke the hush, save the long reverberation of the sea.

Presently, from within the great hulk of silent building, there came the noise of many sandalled feet shuffling ; a wavering illumination beamed upon the dark ; and a procession of monks marched up the nave, each carrying a candle. In front paced Abbot Oskytel, robed in gold-embroidered chasuble, mitre on head, crosier in hand. The procession raised a solemn chant, as they neared the chapel, and the monks ranged themselves about the bars. The Northman stood in the middle of the cage, vigilant, with folded arms. He thought the Abbot quite mad, and therefore to be respected ; and though, from what he had understood of the clergyman's talk, the Northman believed that his life was to be given him with he knew not what of monkish mummery, he was ready to turn Berserk in an instant ; to rush, at the first sign of coercion, upon this mob of singing men in long gowns, killing right and left.

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The psalm ended, the Abbot began to speak in a loud voice. "Behold," said he, "the strange beast of which I told you, transformed into his proper shape, the form of the Norse pirate who long ago fell under judgment (doubtless), and was turned into a witch-wolf. Behold, in fact, the miracle begun. Remained, to end it. The evil spirit should be driven out for ever; the wretchless soul made Christian"; and so forth, and much more, interlarded, according to the fashion of the time, with long citations from the Vulgate. For proof, the Abbot pointed to the carcass of the sheep, its throat evidently torn out by the fangs of a beast. The simple brethren looked and gaped, and believed, because they wanted to believe. And the man from the sea listened gravely, half comprehending; his restless glance travelling ceaselessly upon the bank of solemn, square-jowled faces staring from out a mist of thick breath and candle-shine.

They cast holy water towards him with a little broom of rushes; they prayed tediously in an unknown tongue, and sometimes they sang; until the convert grew weary, and sitting down with his back against the wall he dozed. Presently, he was aware of his friend the Abbot, standing in front of him.

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Oskytel had gone too far to stick at the hazard of a sharp and sudden death; he ventured all on the bare oath of the heathen. But the Northman was persuaded by this time that these strange people meant no harm to him; and he sat still while the Abbot drew a wet finger like a snail, across his forehead, murmuring foreign words, and bound a fillet of white linen the chrism, about his brows. Then, the Abbot took his hand and led him forth of his cage, through a trap opened in the bars, the monks huddling hastily to each side, leaving a lane through their midst.

He was made to kneel upright upon the altar steps; and in this painful attitude he remained, while the Abbot—being in a high state of nervous excitement—preached a sermon of remarkable eloquence. A trumpery achievement, this, perhaps, when you consider the great world that stirred without the monastery walls; but you are to remember that every man lives in a little world of his own, and measures himself against the lesser standard.

If our Abbot really believed that he had performed a miracle, he must (you will say) have deceived himself. But it would seem that such a feat is rarely accomplished, notwithstanding much hearsay to the contrary.

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Dealing with the extraordinary mingled tissue of the priestly mind, almost anything becomes possible. As for the brethren, they were far from the least impulse to weigh what we call evidence, being nurtured upon miracle as upon their daily bread. The Church, which was presently to set her sandalled foot on the necks of kings, was herself founded on a perfectly cataclysmic miracle. There you have it.

So the monks raised a mighty psalm of exultation ; for this was a purple day in the annals of Lindisfarne. Naturally, they did not hear a knocking upon the doors ; nor did they perceive that the gaunt figure upon the altar steps, blinking sleepily at the candles, stiffened suddenly and threw up its head like a hound at gaze.

But on the last notes of the psalm, resounded that ominous knocking, striking upon every heart ; striking the Abbot speechless and motionless, his right hand raised to give the benediction ; twisting every monk in his place, staring and whispering, as the Northman leaped to his feet and ran to the doors.

He rattled down the bars, and flung the great doors wide. A babblement of strange voices streamed in, with the cold light of dawn, and a cold gust of sea-wind. The Northman stood in the white opening, the

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fillet of the chrism still bandaging his forehead, his left hand held aloft, as he had seen the Abbot hold his hand, his right arm and his sword describing bright circles, his voice singing high above the clamour.

“ Back, you heathen. Back—touch me not—speak not to me—I am baptised ! ” bellowed the convert, dancing on the threshold. “ Wolves’ heads, sea-thieves, sackless, outfangthief—avoid ! ”

There was a shout of laughter, a ringing of steel, and a hedge of wild faces pressing into the doorway. Whether the Northman was holding the door, or merely playing with his comrades the Norse pirates, Oskytel perceived that he had but a moment in which to save the brethren. Alas for his miracle ! The Abbot picked up his skirts and ran like a fowl for the tower door, and his flock huddled after him ; while his convert, crying gibes and unspeakable blasphemies, swinging his sword, held the entrance. As he was beaten back, laughing shrill as a sea-gull, Oskytel flung the bars into their sockets on the inside of the door.

Pent in the close tower, the monks hearkened sullenly to the din and crash of the despoilers. Sooner or later, the door would be driven in, or they would be smoked out like wasps. Their indomitable Abbot pressed to and fro

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among them, desperately explaining that their lives had been saved by his miraculous convert, who held the door at the hazard—probably the sacrifice—of his life. But the brethren heard him in a stubborn gloom. They could not see the matter clearly, but they felt there was a flaw somewhere.

“Why did he not warn us?” said one.

“Why did he open the door?” said another, and “If you can work miracles, work one now. In the name of the Almighty, work one now, Oskytel!”

The Abbot sternly bade them to remember the fate of the children of Israel, who had addressed an appeal of the like improper nature to Abbot Moses. Then he climbed alone upon the roof of the tower. His whole world had turned bottom upwards in a moment. But here was no time for idle regrets. He would test this miracle business once and for all; and if it failed, he would jump from the tower, and there would be an end.

Far to seaward, the bright water was dotted in a vast arc with sails, converging upon Lindisfarne. Oskytel threw up his arms and prayed as he had never prayed, that these ships might be English ships—King Edgar's ships. Did he expect to see them changed

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from Norse to English before his eyes? He did not ask himself that question; but stood with dropped hands, staring at the advancing fleet. He tried to count them, but his fingers wandered in the air, like the fingers of a palsied man, and his tongue stumbled among meaningless figures. He watched the sails grow larger, and yet larger, and saw them give back a glint of gold to the sunshine; saw the foam whiten about the beaked swell of the prows, caught the flashes, as from steel buttons, from the shields hung along the gunwale; saw the crews, like little dolls, and the steersmen leaning outboard upon the great steering oars. The leading ship altered course, and the sail swung full into the sun's eye, and there, blazoned in gold on the canvas, were the crowns of King Edgar of England.

As the Northman had even now danced upon the door-sill, so did Oskytel the Abbot dance upon that high place, flinging his arms abroad. When he had done, he went soberly to the hatch of the stair. "Come up, my brethren," said he, very quietly. "Come up hither, and behold the miracle you sought."

They came and they beheld. And when the English, as the old chroniclers say, had "possession of the place of carnage," the Abbot went down to meet the King. In the

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gloom of the church, he stumbled over something soft and bulky. Stooping down, the Abbot was aware of a waft, as of newly opened barrel of strong mead ; and he peered into the unconscious countenance of the man from the sea. The Abbot kicked him covertly, but he might as well have stubbed his toes into a bale of wool.

“ Poor soul,” said Oskytel, gently, “ he sleeps, and no wonder ! Carry him to his cell and—yes—lock the door.”

Behind their Abbot, brave in full canonical panoply, the brethren swung triumphantly down to greet the King, chanting a *Te Deum*. They did not know, nor did their Abbot, that King Edgar, following the counsel of his great ancestor, Alfred, who had written his wisdom in a book for the encouragement of his successors, had of late inaugurated his famous Summer Progress with his whole navy of sixty tall ships and twenty lesser craft, about the Isles of Britain, to the dismay and destruction of all pirates and sea-thieves whatsoever. Nor that the King, by means of swift scouts sailing ahead—as King Alfred had recommended in his book—had so timed his descent upon Lindisfarne, as to catch the marauding Northmen unawares, and so to capture their ships, and afterwards to slay them all. Except one.

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Had not the Danish scout fallen into a snare by reason of his craving for meat, the Northmen might have been warned in time. As it was, he alone was left alive ; and (somewhat to our Abbot's relief) took service with King Edgar, that famous prince, of whom the chronicler writes thus eloquently.

“ Who could not chuse but with the passing and yeerely sayling about this British Albion, with all the lesser Isles next adjacent round about it, he could not chuse, I say, but by such ful and peaceable possession, find himself (according to right, and his heart's desire) the true and soveraigne Monarch of all the British Ocean, environing any way his empire of Albion and Ireland, with the lesser Islands next adjacent: with memorial whereof, as with one very precious jewel Imperial, he adorned the title and crowne of his regalitie.” . . .

There spoke one no less wise than eloquent.

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IN the execution of my office of Secretary to the Inquisitors of the Holy Office in this city of Antwerp, I have curiously observed the workings of heresy. And that which I remark, above all, is the incredible foolishness of the heretic—a thing which must surely give pause to the least reflective. For, *imprimis*, how should a common man be wiser than the old, ancient Catholic and Apostolic Church, grounded upon the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles? But these sectaries delight to make liars of God's saints; and, although the force of their scattered regiments lies wholly in impious denial, they still hope to prevail against the ordered legions of Holy Church. So it is, in that disorderly army, that an unconsidered chance often delivers me your heretic bound into the hands of his enemies.

Such an event is well exemplified in the particular affair of Gerard Ogier, the pestilent preacher, which I will relate. It happened in

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October, in the year 1564, and began in this wise. Upon a frosty evening, when I was sitting alone in my chamber, my servant came to me, saying that one Margaret Houyuët desired to speak with me. (In my position a man can never be private.) The said Margaret Houyuët coming in, I perceived a tall and meagre woman, with great eyes of a black lustre. Her lips made a scarlet thread in her face, which narrowed swiftly upon a peaked chin. She stood silent, and under the shadow of her black hood her eyes held me. I inquired of her what was her business.

“Honourable Master Secretary,” she made reply, “they tell me it is to you I must come to get a malignant heretic taken?”

I answered that she did right to come to me, and sat down to my desk to note her replies to my interrogations. Name, Margaret Houyuët; unmarried; age, thirty-seven; occupation, maker of bonnets. Native to this city? Native of Bruges, but dwelling in this city for fifteen years past. Desires to deliver to the Holy Office one Gerard Ogier, lately sent from England to disseminate pestilent doctrine.

Further interrogated upon the doings of the said Gerard Ogier, Margaret Houyuët designated sufficient to have burned the said

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Gerard Ogier seven times over. "You have, then, the proper hatred towards the new religion," I observed, when I had done with my questions. She regarded me as though she understood not my words. I repeated them. "The new religion?" said she. "The new religion is all one with a harlot—a painted harlot."

I knew not what to think of her; but with women, one cannot always comprehend. "And thus, in the zeal of virtue," said I, "you spied upon this man?" "Thus and thus . . . and to gain the blood-money," the deponent answered. Upon that, I wrote an order for the statutory reward, to be paid upon the condemnation of the said Ogier, and gave it to the woman. She looked upon it as one looks who cannot read. "What is the sum?" she asked. "Twenty-five florins." Margaret Houyuet kneeled down beside the hearth, lit the paper at the flame, watched it twist and blacken in her fingers and wither into air, and dropped the last fragment on the tiles. I regarded her steadfastly, holding my peace. The times were troubled, and distemper was much in the air. Perchance Margaret Houyuet was lunatic, and there was no Gerard Ogier in the world. The fire whispered in the silence, and I heard the Cathedral chimes ringing

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without, far and high and thin. "I have heard the bells ring to the tune of one plain-song for many a year . . . and the Jews bought a field with Iscariot his money," said Margaret Houyuet, gazing upon me with a countenance illegible. "A green field, shuddering in the wind, all specked with shadows . . . flying shadows." She got to her feet, and I saw a bright spot, reflected from the candle-flame, gleam in each of her eyes. "God keep you, honourable Master Secretary," said Margaret Houyuet, and she went out.

The same night I had Gerard Ogier brought into the prison. He was a man of large stature, with yellow locks and the face of a sheep. The next day he was put to the question; and so soon as his sinews cracked he began to confess all. Sixteen years since he had broken from the monastery of the Benedictines at Bruges. Thence he fled into England. Of a certainty he did deny the Miracle of the Host. Latterly he had returned to the Netherlands to preach the reformed doctrines; and so forth, and much more to the same end. Whereupon, the judge of the tribunal delivered sentence that the prisoner should be burned alive. (Without doubt a person roasting quick at the stake presents a melancholy spectacle to

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the humane ; but how should ruth be shown towards one who would wantonly persuade a whole nation into the flaming jaws of hell ?)

On the third day after the condemnation, the fire was prepared in the market-place ; and thither I accompanied the magistrates, the executioner, and the men-at-arms with the prisoner, as sorted with my duty. The streets were thronged with the turbulent populace ; heads looked forth of every window ; the air was full of a furious clamour ; and as we drew near to the market-place, the people with one voice began to chant the One Hundred and Thirtieth Psalm.

De profundis clamavi. . . . The great sound rolled like the sea : not a man of us but feared his death-song in that hour. But the halberdiers flinched not ; and the fanatic Ogier, naked to his shirt, was presently bound to his stake, high above the mob, upon a pile of faggots mixed with straw and pitch, with a chain fastened about his middle and a leathern collar choking him. One thrust a torch into the pile, the flames sprang up, and the people, with a great roaring cry, pressed upon the soldiers and fought with them. Whereupon the executioner, fearing a rescue, leaped upon the

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faggots and stabbed the prisoner to the heart, thrice. But the halberdiers drove back the people; from where I stood, I saw the bright steel reddened; and the mob, seeing that their man was dead, presently drew off. We left the fire as it was, the flames busily climbing, and a dusky pillar of smoke overhanging the open square; for the soldiers durst not then remove the body.

Very early the next morning, before the day was astir, I went with a sergeant and a file of halberdiers to take away the corse. The fog of dawn hung low upon the dripping roofs, and the jingling chimes of the Cathedral fell muffled upon the ear, as we came into the solitary market-place. The scorched and tattered body of the heretic drooped upon the blackened stake; and sitting in the ashes beneath, with her chin in her hands, was the woman Margaret Houyuet. Her eyes peered through the veil of her long black hair, which was all sprinkled over with ashes. Seeing us draw near, she rose, and went a little way off, and stood still in the dusk shadow while the soldiers wound the body of Gerard Ogier in a sheet, and laid it upon a hand-bier, and set the burden on their shoulders. The woman followed us, like a stray dog, all the way to the riverside; where, at a

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point below the town, the boat was moored. She stood watching, while the bier was laid in the fore part of the boat, and the men took their places; and her face was the face of a soul in torment, such an one as I have often had opportunity to observe, in my employment. Seeing myself about to embark, Margaret Houyuet came towards me, twisting her hands together.

“Good my lord, for the love of God, let me come into the boat,” said she. “For the love of God and the Mother of God, hinder me not, honourable Master Secretary.”

I told her I could not grant her request, and commanded her to go hence. But she kneeled down—that strange woman all white with ashes, and covered with her snaky hair—and would have clasped my knees, while she besought me in a weeping voice.

“Give the woman her will, Honourable; we shall all be overlooked else,” quoth the sergeant. “Surely she hath the Eye.”

Willing to see the end, I yielded, and bade her to go in the boat if she listed. Whereupon the woman stepped nimbly across the thwarts and sat down over against the bier. The men put off into mid-stream, while one fastened with ropes a great stone at the head, and another at the foot, of the corse. The

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mist hung so thick about us that we glided beneath a moving dome of vapour; and jangling thin and high, like a spray of beaten silver, I heard the falling chimes of the Cathedral tower. Margaret Houyuet sat twisting a green kerchief about her wrists, and drawing fast a knot with her teeth. The men presently held their oars, in order that the body might be committed to the flowing water, according to our custom in these affairs. Then the woman got to her feet, and stood with her bound hands in front of her, the men looking at her sidelong.

"Hearken," said Margaret Houyuet, addressing me, "hearken, honourable Master Secretary. . . . Men are vile beasts, all. Yet this poor carrion"—she gently touched the breast of the corse with her bound hands, and stopped for a moment. Again, in the silence, the bells chimed, far and faint. "Ay, I hear you!" said Margaret Houyuet. "He was a tall man," went on the woman, "and he was mine. He was my man. He broke his monk's vows to come to me—and very long ago we dwelt together in Bruges city. But the new religion whispered in his ears day and night, and plucked his sleeve, and called him out of dark places, and he went away . . . and after many years he came back, and when he saw me—when he saw me, he railed upon me in

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the street, and drove me from him. Before the Mother of God, honourable Master Secretary, this is truth."

She turned swiftly and flung herself upon the body with a little cry, slipped the loop of her arms over the stone at its head, clasping the shoulders, and rose to her feet. The swaddled shape rose with her, cinctured with her arms, and before a hand might be lifted, the living and the dead plunged into the flowing water, and sank before our eyes.

Thus, betrayed into the hands of the Holy Office by his own foolishness, which leaped out upon him after fifteen years, perished this fool heretic.

THE APOSTLE OF PORT ROYAL

THE APOSTLE OF PORT ROYAL

"Par divers moyens on arrive à pareille fin."

MONTAIGNE.

DENIS DE L'ISLE, the runaway monk, looking down upon the convent of Port Royal des Champs, blessed the Providence which had brought him to so desirable a haven. The summer sun burned upon the summit of the hills that enclosed the valley on all sides save the east; but the trim gardens and sumptuous buildings of the nunnery lay in a cool blue shadow; the bells, chiming to vespers, made a peaceful music; a lazy spiral of smoke curled from the kitchen chimney; and the wayfarer, leg-weary, hungry, and athirst, descended the hillside, filled with the most comfortable anticipations.

At this time all France was ringing with the exploits of King Henry of Navarre, who had lately entered Paris in triumph; and Brother Denis was on his way to the capital

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in the hope of obtaining a place about the Court. Within a few leagues of his destination, the adventurer found himself somewhat ragged and almost penniless; yet it was highly necessary that he should enter the city in some more taking guise than that of a starveling monk. Port Royal des Champs was richly endowed, and the nuns bore a reputation for some frivolity of conversation. Hence, the convent appeared to Denis a singularly attractive house of entertainment, and by the time he reached the entrance he had made and unmade a thousand ingenious plans of spoliation.

The porter was absent from the gate-house, and the doors stood open to all comers—a negligence which went far to confirm the monk in his pleasing belief as to an habitual laxity of discipline. He entered the courtyard, which was empty save for the pigeons; in front of him rose the tall buttresses and traceried windows of the chapel, and in the angle, formed by the junction of the courtyard wall with that of the transept, an oaken door stood open. Passing through it, Denis found himself in the Strangers' Burying Ground, an oblong enclosure with an archway in the farther wall, through which he could see (like a picture set in a frame) the nuns in their

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white habits walking to and fro in the cloister garden. In the centre of the square enclosure stood a great stone cross, upon the steps of which a little figure was sitting in an attitude of meditation, her graceful outline clearly relieved against the black shadows of the cloister arcading beyond. As the monk passed in the doorway she looked up, rose, and came towards him, and Denis saw to his surprise that she was scarce older than a child.

"Pardon me, my father," she said with dignity, "but strangers are not permitted to enter the cloisters. Follow me, if you please."

Denis, he knew not why, was plunged by this unexpected greeting into an extreme embarrassment. Beside this dainty little nun he felt rude, unkempt, and clumsy; and he walked silently behind her, like a schoolboy detected in a trespass. It was not until his guide had ushered him into the reception-room provided for visitors, that he plucked up courage to thank her for her courtesy, at the same time requesting her to acquaint the Mother Superior with the arrival of a friar who craved a night's hospitality.

"I am the Mother Superior, and Port Royal welcomes you, as she doth all strangers, but especially those of the household of Holy Church," said the little nun glibly, as if re-

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peating a phrase learned by rote. "I will go and tell Father Jehan you are come," she added, her manner suddenly changing to that of ordinary intercourse. "He will ask you to sup with him, and invite you to preach to-morrow. Do you like preaching?"

"Why, as to that," said Denis, set a little more at ease, "I think it likely that I discover more pleasure in that exercise than doth the congregation."

"That is what I have always thought to myself," returned the Abbess eagerly. "O, I would dearly love to preach!"

"And I to hear you," said Denis politely.

"You are a strange monk," remarked the Abbess, looking at him curiously. "You are not like Father Jehan, or the friars who come sometimes."

"Perhaps I am not a monk at all," he returned. "What would you say to that?"

"I had a dream once," she said, still staring absently at him, "and now it comes into my mind that perhaps you are the man."

"And what was the dream?" asked Denis, somewhat taken aback.

But a fit of shyness fell upon the Abbess; she took refuge in her character of Mother Superior, and murmuring that she would despatch a servant to minister to the holy

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father's wants, she withdrew abruptly, leaving the monk in some wonder.

It was no uncommon practice in those days, for an influential family, in order to keep the disposal of the property in their own hands, to place a mere child at the head of a great establishment such as Port Royal. Denis was naturally aware of this custom, and that his youthful hostess should occupy so exalted a position did not strike him as exceptional; but something in the personality of the demure and ingenuous maiden captivated him at a blow. He was inspired all at once with an overmastering desire to find favour in her eyes.

Denis supped that night with Father Jehan the Chaplain, a little, old, red gentleman with a puckered face, and a voice that sounded as though its owner were always on the brink of tears. After requesting Denis to preach on the morrow (a compliment invariably accorded in those days by the monastic clergy to their ecclesiastical visitors) and receiving his assent, Father Jehan displayed an insatiable appetite for news of the great world outside the convent policies. Denis related all he knew, and more, till what with the wine and the talk his senior's face began to shine, and he grew happy and expansive as a schoolboy.

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"If all I have heard be true, brother," Denis hinted presently, "the Sisters of Port Royal find time between orisons and visiting the poor, for gayer employments."

"Eh, you come a little too late, young man," replied the confessor, cocking an eyebrow. "Since they put a chit of a girl over the heads of her elders there has been a wonderful improvement in godliness. She seems to impart a taste for piety without intending it. And why not, I say, for Mère Angélique is a worthy little child at heart, and as easy as an old shoe about the discipline. When you come to carry my weight, brother, you'll find the benefit of a judicious forbearance."

"Is she, then, so terribly *dévoté*?" inquired Denis.

"She takes to religion as you and I to—to wine, brother," said the Chaplain. "Or would, did I allow it—fill up and pass the bottle—but I don't."

"Why not?" Denis asked.

"Jehan sum, non Paulus," replied his host sleepily; and indeed at the moment the excellent confessor much more resembled the heathen god Silenus than any member of the Christian hierarchy.

But Denis had obtained the clue he wanted; did he desire to gain the favour of the Abbess,

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it was clear that he must pose as an evangelist. He abandoned some alluring projects with a sigh, and resolved, since so it must be, to clothe himself for the nonce in garments of light. So, bidding Father Jehan good-night, he repaired to his lodging, and sat down to compose an oration for the morrow. Brother Denis had a poetic spark in his constitution; he could wield the spell of language; a born opportunist, he would denounce vanity in a sermon, or improvise a ballad in praise of folly, with equal sincerity and conviction. Thus, by the time his discourse was complete, he was so sensibly affected by his own exhortations, that had he been a martyr condemned to execution at sunrise, this remarkable zealot could not have lain down to sleep in a more fervent glow of pious enthusiasm.

The Chapel of Port Royal, in later years, echoed to the eloquence of the greatest divines in France; but its walls never rung with a more stirring admonition than that delivered by the vagrant monk next morning. He had, as it were, laid a wager with himself to compel the admiration of the slender girl, who sat beneath the foliated canopy of the Abbess's throne, listening with such a rapt attention. But intent as he was upon this

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enterprise, he took careful note (while Father Jehan gabbled a perfunctory mass) of the rich ornaments and furniture of the sanctuary ; for from amongst the profusion of gifts upon the altar he must pick the corner-stone of his fortune's edifice. Brother Denis would have been well advised had he then and there seized an opportunity to hide the golden and bejewelled pyx under his frock, and made good his escape. But the desire of seeing Mère Angélique once more was too strong for him, and after wandering about the precincts for hours in the hope of meeting her, the monk found himself in the Ambulatory, a broad pathway running between the north wall of the convent and the fish-ponds, beneath an avenue of great trees. On the farther side of the pool the woods climbed the hillside into the sky, so that the still water held a reflected forest, where fish swam among the branches. Presently a door in the wall opened, and a thrill shook Denis as he saw Mère Angélique step from the sunlit garden into the green shade. She hesitated a moment, and then advanced timidly towards him. Her face was pale, and disfigured with the marks of tears. The monk felt instinctively that their relative positions were reversed. He had gained his ignoble wager.

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"What ails you, my daughter?" he said kindly. "Are you in trouble?"

"In great trouble of mind, father," she answered; and the tones of her voice told of such distress that the monk's heart smote him. "I would make you my confession, for I am sore in need of absolution and ghostly counsel. Like a great light your words have illumined the darkness of my heart, and discovered my sin to me."

Denis perceived that he had overshot his mark. He had proposed to himself to act a part extremely opposed to that of father confessor, and thus his plans again suffered an unforeseen reverse. So he constrained himself to listen, marvelling at the extraordinary refinement of conscience revealed in such a relation, and wondering what he was to say to it all. To treat the whole matter lightly would be to step down from his pedestal, while to deal strictly with such a penitent was more than he could do. He decided upon compromise, and, telling the Abbess he would set her a fitting penance on the morrow (by which time the confessor resolved he would be some miles on the road to Paris), he gave her absolution.

But when, consoled and happy as a forgiven child, she had left him, Denis lingered till the

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bats began to squeak in the twilight, and the moon, peering over the rim of the hills, flung a track of gold upon the water. The monk stood and looked at that shining pathway. Should he follow the gleam of gold across the water and over the hills to unknown glories? Or should he stay and make his abode in that remote and quiet valley, under the rule of the charming little Abbess? When he retired for the night, his heated imagination wove a series of brilliant pictures before his eyes, and he fell asleep in a state of miserable indecision. But next morning Denis awoke at dawn, with his brain clear, and the wheels of his mind running as they had been oiled. He reviewed the position at a glance, and made his decision. Between matins and prime the church would be empty; here was his opportunity; what childish folly to fling it away for a passing fancy! And as the rising sun washed the pinnacles of the chapel with gold, Denis hurried across the sleeping courtyard, and entered the building by the door in the north transept. The place held so deep a silence that his very breathing sounded loud and harsh; he stole to the gate in the iron grille that shut off the transept from the body of the church, opened it cautiously, and paused,

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struck motionless on the threshold. The tapers burned, dots of pale orange, upon the altar; high above them a strong beam of sunlight slanted through the great east window, making a broad, misty radiance alive with dancing atoms; the jewelled gewgaws gleamed darkly behind the altar lights; but between them and the monk knelt Mère Angélique, absorbed in devotion. All the adventurer's cunning resolutions went suddenly out of his head. Crossing silently to the suppliant figure he touched her on the shoulder.

"Peace be with you, my daughter," he said gently. She started and turned with a faint cry; then a shade of disappointment fell swiftly across her bright face.

"Ah, my father, it is you!" she said quickly. "I had thought it the Christ Himself," she added under her breath. "I have been praying so hard all night that He would show me some token of His favour—but, alas! His heaven is fast shut."

The pathos in her voice pierced the masquerader's susceptible heart. He knelt down and put his arm round her.

"Ay," he said, "the heaven is shut, but never grieve for that, *chérie*! I was a monk once, and I tell you this religion is all a dream."

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She drew herself away, gazing at him in bewilderment.

"A dream!" she said. "A dream! In *my* dream I saw you standing in the cloister doorway, and upon your forehead was God's seal, I thought. What is it you are saying? I do not understand."

"Come away with me, Angélique," cried Denis. "Come out into the brave world beyond these gloomy walls. There is feasting and fighting, making love and marrying—there life marches gaily to music down a road bestrewn with flowers. Will you stay for ever in this miserable sepulchre? Will you waste your beauty in fruitless prayer and fasting? You will find the true God out of doors in the sunshine, *chérie*."

Mère Angélique stared at him, horror dawning in her eyes. She had risen while Denis was speaking, and he stood in front of her, holding her hands. But when he paused she wrenched herself away from him.

"O," she cried, "how can you talk so wickedly? I think you must be the devil! Or perhaps you are only trying my faith. O, say you are only trying my faith," she pleaded.

Denis hesitated a moment. The child's words opened a last avenue of escape from

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the consequences of his folly. With a stout effort he regained command over himself, and his mobile countenance changed instantly to an expression of solemnity.

"My daughter," he said gravely, "thou hast rightly guessed. Did I not tell thee I would inflict a penance? Behold, it is accomplished! *Absolve te.*"

Mère Angélique startled the monk by falling at his feet in a passion of tears.

"Then it is true, after all; and thou art the messenger I saw in my dream," she sobbed. "Thou hast shown me the hidden path of righteousness, my father, and I will try—I will try to walk therein."

"That is well. Give me thine hand—so," said Denis, raising her. "Now dry thy tears, and I would counsel thee to seek rest until noonsong. Adieu, my daughter. *Dieu vous bénisse!*"

The little Abbess bestowed upon him a look of childlike gratitude that the monk remembered all his shifty life; and still shaken with weeping, but serenely happy, she walked slowly away from him down the church. Denis, left alone upon the altar steps, stood gazing after her until the door, clanging heavily, hid her from his sight. The sound struck dismally upon his heart, arousing a

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sense of loss and discomfiture. Then he turned wistfully to the tempting wealth upon the altar, and shook his head with a wry face.

"Comes a maiden, and all a man's plans are upset one by one," he murmured. "To rob a church—*à donc!* how inconsistent with the rôle of an apostle. No, one cannot have everything. Denis de l'Isle comes as a thief and a robber; and lo! he must shine as a saint, and depart in a halo of sanctity. Ignatius Loyola himself could do no more. And it would be a thousand pities to risk again the disillusion of *la belle Angélique*. I will flee temptation . . . *mais, mon Dieu, que je demeure sot en trois lettres!*"

Ten minutes later, Mère Angélique, kneeling at her open casement, watched the figure of a monk walk swiftly down the white road into the rosy sunrise, and dwindle out of sight upon the brightness.

And is it not written in the Chronicles of Port Royal des Champs how the establishment of austere discipline, from which resulted the lofty reputation for piety enjoyed ever afterwards by the Sisters, dated from the visit of a stranger who preached a most wonderful sermon and then vanished away, no one knew whither?

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PROLOGUE

THE BLACK BOX

IT was late at night, and I was leaning on the sill of the window of my room in the Charing Cross Hotel, which looked out upon an open well. Within the room whose window faced mine the blinds were undrawn, and a yellow dot of gas glimmered in the dark. Suddenly, the light was turned up, and I saw that two men had entered the room. They divested themselves of coat and hat, and sat down before the fire with cigarettes. Presently, one rose and busied himself about a tray set with decanters and glasses. Desisting from this employment, he disappeared into the next room, to return carrying a black box, which looked like a large despatch-box. Setting it upon the table, he unlocked it and lifted the lid. His friend looked within, dropped the glass he held, and

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stepped back with a startled face; and, at the same moment, the man who had opened the black box glanced round, and, stepping to the window, pulled the blind smartly down.

Here was a singular incident; and who, beholding it, would not be taken with a lively curiosity to know what, contained in a despatch-box, could strike a ruddy and stout young British gentleman all to pieces in the twinkling of an eye?

It came to pass, that in due time I was to make the acquaintance of the owner of the black box; whom I may here venture to characterise as a most amiable gentleman, entirely unspoiled by his recent accession to a comfortable fortune.

"If *he* were not there," said my friend, indicating the black box with a backward jerk of the thumb, "why, *I* shouldn't be here, you know."

He threw the lid back, and a dead face looked into mine from half-closed eyes: a dusky, withered face, with a hooked nose, and a thick tawny beard, framed and packed close in a kind of golden silk. I requested an explanation.

"I will lend you, if you like, the ancestral manuscript which contains the history of the

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deceased," said my amiable friend. "It came to me along with the Chudleigh estates."

In the thick volume of brown, spidery manuscript, bound in brown leather, I found the narrative of a voyage to the East Indies, written by one Mr Charles Chudleigh, in the year 1597.

From March, when the ship "cut sail," to June, there is little in Mr Chudleigh's account to distinguish it from the voyagers' journals of the period; it is when *The Virgin God Save Her* is within a day's sail of the port of Cochin, in the Indian Ocean (and making very bad weather of it) that the interest begins.

Here, then, follows Mr Chudleigh's story.

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BEING THE NARRATIVE OF MR CHARLES CHUDLEIGH, SOMETIME
GENTLEMAN-ADVENTURER IN THE BARK "THE VIRGIN
GOD SAVE HER"

While we were yet some twenty leagues from the port of Cochin, we were overtaken in the night by a fearful storm, with lightning and thunder and a great rain, so that we drove before the tempest. There was none of us that did not expect to perish, and those who were so minded were diligently repeating prayers; when lo! of a sudden, in the pitchy

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dark, there shone bright lights above the ship, hanging in the air like candles : one above the main-top-mast, another above the mizzen yard-arm, and a third over the bowsprit. Then those mariners who pled with Heaven began instantly to give thanks, saying that here were the blessed Lights of Saint Elmo (called by the Portuguese *Corpo Sancto*), and that now the storm would instantly abate its violence. In the light of the dawning they vanished, and then, truly, the wind did begin to decrease and the waters to go down. Upon the next night *The Virgin God Save Her* rolled at her anchors in the harbour of Cochin. 'Twas near midnight, and I had come upon watch. The thunder growled across the waters, and a thick darkness covered us, cleft now and again by waving sheets of flame ; when masts and furled sails and ropes were drawn black as ink upon the flare, to be instantly swallowed in the night. I was standing in the waist, hearkening to the music of the fiddles which the minstrels played in the captain's cabin, where Mr Gray was at supper with his officers ; when there came a glare of lightning, and I beheld the apparition of a man dressed all in white, passing scarce two yards in front of me. The skin of its hand gleamed like gold, and its face was a golden

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blot, blank of all feature. Not a little terrified, I perceived the light issue from the opening door of the cabin; then the door was shut, and, at the same moment, the music stopped.

Between the pauses of the thunder, I heard a noise of talk break out in the cabin, and presently the fiddling began anew, upon a single instrument, that was handled by one who brought forth such strains as were assuredly beyond the power of any crowder in the ship's company.

The watch being changed, I went below, to lie marvelling at this strange affair. The man must have plied from the mainland to the ship in a canoe. But why had he chosen the dead middle of the night to come aboard? And what mountebank was this, to wear a faceless golden mask? And, indeed, save that Mr Gabriel Simeon ever loved to act, if it were possible, like none other, I have never found sufficient answer to these questions.

Before breakfast, the whole crew, gentlemen and mariners, was piped into the waist. Captain Abel Gray stood against the poop railing; and beside him, rising head and shoulders higher, stood a great man dressed all in white Calicut, with a brown eye as lively as a falcon's, and tawny moustachios and beard. It was to

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hear what this gentleman, Mr Gabriel Simeon, had to say to us, that the captain had called us together. Whereupon Mr Simeon told us he had sure knowledge that in the Island of Sumatra was hidden a certain great treasure. The princes of that country (said he) were all buried with their armour and jewels in the Valley of Kings, each with a gravestone of gold set with gems at his head, waiting for honest English mariners to come and take them all away. If we would share with him in this venture, said Mr Gabriel Simeon, himself, on his part, would engage to come at the booty. And the upshot was, that captain and crew did agree to follow Gabriel Simeon in his adventure. So *The Virgin God Save Her* ran east for the Isle of Sumatra, where we dropped anchor in the Bay of Achen. During this time I had been much with Mr Gabriel Simeon. The rest avoided his company, because he was simply an Hebrew Jew, with a hook to his nose and a shuffle in his gait. So it befell that Simeon and myself stood together apart, looking at the Island of Sumatra, which lay all ruddy to behold in the sunset light, and covered with great woods, which climbed from the water's edge to the base of a sugar-loaf hill, splitten and black, rising high into the radiant sky. An alluring fragrance blew in our faces.

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as though a jar of spices were broken upon the air.

"In that hill a king's ransom lies entombed!" cried Mr Simeon. "Our eyes shall yet behold a city of golden sepulture, and our hands shall spoil the wealthy habitations of the dead. But at first, Chudleigh, my simple child, you shall trade for pepper and indigo and balsams, while I bide my time on shipboard."

And so it was that while the most of the company went ashore to visit the king, and to truck, with mirrors and drinking glasses and coral trinkets, for bhars of pepper and spicery, Mr Gabriel Simeon sat taking his ease in his cabin. The trading going on for a week, the ship was laden to the hatches; when the captain and the trading party came aboard, saying that the King's Secretary, his chief officers (called Subandars) and a guard of soldiers would come to dine with them in the ship the next day. Upon that, Mr Gabriel Simeon warned the captain against treachery. At first Mr Gray would not hearken to him; but Mr Simeon pleading very earnestly that the lives of all were set upon a useless hazard, the captain presently agreed to give him the charge of the watch on deck, with leave to take what measures he listed. So Mr Simeon filled the tops with stones, loaded the two cannon in the

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forecastle, and armed the watch with sword, pistol, and dagger. Next day, to the music of gongs, drums, and trumpets, there comes me aboard the King's Secretary and his four Subandars, attended by some fifty soldiers, armed with krises, hand-darts, cutlasses, and shields. They brought with them a great jar of aqua-vitæ, and the two crews (saving the watch) sat down together; and before ten minutes were gone, our men began to laugh and to sing like mad creatures. Their faces flushed red, their eyes shone, they capered and danced upon the tables. (There is in this country a kind of seed, whereof a little being eaten, turns a man into fool-frolic; and with this the aqua-vitæ was infected.) At this the Sumatrans set upon them to slay them, and the men stationed in the tops began to rain down great stones upon the mellay. Captain Gray was tumbling with a brown villain on the deck, when Mr Simeon thrust his rapier down the Indian's throat, and so saved the captain. Then Mr Simeon and myself and six more charged upon the Sumatrans, slaying many, and driving many overboard, and the rest into the stern cabin, where they swiftly barricadoed the doors. Immediately we dragged the two culverins from the forecastle, and setting the mouth of a gun against each

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of the two cabin doors, thrust a match to the touch-hole. So we rid the ship of the Sumatrans; but ourselves lost some fifteen men in the affray. Meanwhile, there was a long war-galley making ready at the quay-side, and we had but time to hoist sail before it put forth to pursue us. But, upon our firing a broadside of great ordnance, the proa turned back again.

The next day, being anchored three or four leagues from the island, there was held a council of war. Some said one thing and some another; but the end of it was, Mr Gabriel Simeon made oration, putting us in mind that, inasmuch as he had never been ashore, he was unknown to the Sumatrans; that he had some knowledge of their language; and affirming that here was the opportunity for which he had waited hitherto. He asked no more (he said) than to be set on shore that night, and for *The Virgin God Save Her* to lie in the offing for three days, keeping watch for his signal fire. If no such signal were to be seen before the end of that time, the ship was to depart, leaving Mr Simeon to his fate. But the moment the fire was descried, he would have the ship's pinnace to put off, manned with a crew armed *cap-à-pie*, who should row for the landing-place nearest to the signal.

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We had no expectation of any profit to be made by this adventure; nor did the life of one Jew weigh down the balance. But the captain said that Mr Simeon had saved his life and the ship's, and so Mr Gray could not stick at aught in reason for the man; and the rest agreed with the captain. Afterwards, I persuaded Mr Simeon to suffer me to go with him, and he brought me into his cabin, and gave me Indian clothes of white Calicut cloth, and a turban, and stained my skin to the savage hue. Simeon disguised himself in the same manner, hiding his great beard beneath a scarf. Each of us wore an Indian kris (a sharp sword without a cross hilt), and carried a poniard concealed; and Simeon took his fiddle. Thus equipped, we were set on shore at nightfall in a little retired cove. The woods and rocks were all black and silver in the light of a marvellous great moon; the dark was sown with innumerable glittering fireflies; and the whole air resounded with the breaching of the sea.

"And where are we going?" said I.

"To the Temple," answered Simeon. "To the House of the False Prophet. In every polity," he went on, as we began to walk forward through the tangle of light and dark, "in every kingdom, civil or barbarous, you

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shall find a priest or else a woman sitting at the heart of it, spinning webs like a bloody spider. We will go visit the priest, Chudleigh."

And as we went, Simeon told me how the Sumatrans worshipped the Prophet Mahomet after their barbarous manner; and how they kept his temple ever in readiness for him, because the False Prophet had said that he would certainly return some day; and how it was their custom, once a year, for the King and his whole court to visit the temple in state, riding upon elephants, to see if perchance the Messias had fulfilled his promise at last.

After walking for two hours or more, we came out from glades of woodland upon a broad track, leading upwards through the forest towards a dim round building, at the foot of the sugar-loaf hill, which rose black and solitary, blotting out a regiment of stars. We followed the broad road, ever ascending, until the forest opened out on either hand into a wild garden, where were glittering pools of water, and groves, and flowering bushes, giving forth a heady perfume. A noise of croaking frogs filled the air, like the ringing hum of many skaters skating, and great toads of a dull scarlet colour would hop sluggishly out of our path. A domed roof grew out of the black

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hillside in front of us, and long buildings ran to left and right, and were lost among the thick old-grown trees.

"What to do withal?" said Gabriel Simeon. "Here is the temple—and death lies skulking in ambush. What to do now, friend Charles?" quoth he; and stood whistling a catch in his teeth.

One thing seemed as good as another to me, upon this emprise; and in silence I watched Gabriel Simeon hug his fiddle under his chin. He stepped behind a thick bush, and a sweet and lively melody broke upon the frogs' chorus. From tree to tree we stole nearer and nearer to the great door, the Jew still fiddling. I know not if he thought to charm the chief priest from his slumbers; but, when he stopped, and the delicate echoes, answering near and far, had died away, the frowning mansion rested dumb as a tomb. We came to the door, which was all of solid metal; and, finding it fast shut, we began to walk beneath the building to the left, among the fragrant bushes, and the gleaming water starred with yellow blossoms, and the red toads. Presently we came beneath an overhanging balcony closed in with lattices.

Standing in the shadow, the Jew fiddled upon another tune. The little fountain of

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silvern melody rose and fell, and rose again ; and lo ! the shutters upon the balcony opened, and two or three heads looked forth. Simeon stopped instantly ; there was a sound of women's whispering ; and a woman's voice cried out in the Indian tongue. The women whispered above us out of sight while a man might have counted a hundred.

Then Simeon thrust the fiddle suddenly into my hands, and taking off his turban, he drew forth something that gleamed faintly, drew it over his face and head, drew something over his hands (but leaving the fingers free), and put on his turban again. Once more the soft call fell from above ; and Gabriel Simeon took the fiddle from me, and drew an amorous little air from the strings, and stopped upon a dying fall. There came a sound of laughter, and once more the strange words. Simeon took me by the arm and gave me the viol again.

"Do you know who we are, Chudleigh ?" he whispered. "You are the Prophet Mahomet's disciple, deaf and mute, and I am the Messias himself."

With that he stepped into the moonlight, and, in the same moment, I beheld the golden man whom I had seen in the harbour of Cochin. The women cried out ; and the Pro-

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phet Mahomet spoke to them in their own tongue.

"I know not who are these women, but they shall let us in," said the golden face in my ear. "Forget not you are my deaf-and-dumb disciple, as you love life, Chudleigh."

The door opened, a light shone, and there appeared a wench, a handsome wench, with a skin the colour of honey, carrying a little brazen lamp. She held it high, gazing at us out of narrow black eyes; then she made obeisance, and said somewhat, and turned about, and we followed her along a stone passage and up a flight of stairs into an upper room, where were four or five women, seated and reclining upon mats. Little brazen lamps stood here and there upon the floor, and the air was heavy with perfume. Gabriel Simeon paused on the threshold, lifted his hand and spoke; whereupon the women lifted their hands, palms together, and bowed themselves, answering in a word. Then the Messiah sat down cross-legged, and began to talk, while I sat behind him. He talked for a long while, and the women answered him now and again. They brought us sweetmeats, and betel-nut for chewing, and aqua-vitæ to drink. Thus we sat until I grew uneasy, and admonished Gabriel Simeon with my foot. He glanced

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about and nodded, and a little after, he took the damsel who had brought us in, and led her apart. The moonlight shone broad through the open lattice, upon the great figure of the Golden Messiah, standing with his arm about his wench; the white light mingled strangely with the yellow shimmer of the lamps; and in the scented shadow and shine there sparkled, with tiny sparkles, the eyes of the women, and their white teeth glimmered, and their ornaments tinkled, as they lay whispering and looking upon me. Often, in visions of the night, have I revisited that place and time, and made music upon the Jew's fiddle, which I left in the chamber.

At last Simeon made as if to go. The girl to whom he talked took a lamp, and went before us down the stairs, and along a narrow cloister lit from on high by round windows like port-holes, and through bare stone rooms and passages, up and down more stairs to a door opening upon a long passage. Here Simeon embraced her lovingly, and we went on towards a haze of moonshine.

"I am glad we are done with the women," said I.

"Done with them, sirrah? Let me tell you, all those damsels are my wives," said the Golden Messiah. "These are Vestals,

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daughters of the nobles of this country, who are reserved for the appearing of Mahomet, and . . . Hearken!"

A tiny sound, like the sound of human speech, rose and fell from afar. It ceased, and the profound silence again fell about us. Were we closed in the very bowels of the earth, no huger weight of silence could have descended upon us.

Once more we stole forward, until we came into a great chamber, lit from on high by a range of narrow windows. By this time the death-cold dawn had begun to pale the darkness; and we discerned a kind of throne rising in the midst of the chamber. The lower part of the walls seemed to be hung with arras of cloth-of-gold, and, on three sides, doorways opened. We entered through the first into a bare, dusky chamber lighted by a tiny opening in the ceiling, and leading to an inner room, which led to another; we entered the second doorway to discover three desolate chambers more. Returning to the outer hall, of a sudden the silence was shattered by a voice—the voice of a man praying with a high and beseeching intonation; and within the third portal we beheld the kneeling figure of an old, gaunt man. His voice died, and he remained gazing upon us with his arms outstretched.

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"The priest!" said Simeon. "We must take him captive, Chudleigh."

He drew out a length of cord, and we laid hold of the priest, who struggled like a wild animal. But we bound him hand and foot, and seated him against the wall.

"What a murrain to do with the old man?" said the Golden Messiah. "He would never put faith in me—not he. Doubtless we should put him out of the way; the time is so short, you see."

I said I thought it a hard thing to butcher the old man.

"The Indians had no such pragmatistical scruples aboard *The Virgin*," said Gabriel.

"But why is the time so murderous short?"

"I'll tell you in a word," quoth he. "Tomorrow—nay, to-day—is the Festival of the Messiah, when the King and the Court come to the temple to seek him. The women told me of it. Behold that Prophet!" said Gabriel Simeon, smiting his breast. "But what to do with the clergyman?" he added.

We regarded the captive, who stared boldly in our faces.

Simeon spoke to the old man, and they talked together for a space. "He says none but the King knows the burial-place," Simeon

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said. "But I think he lies. Shall we put him to the question?"

We bound a piece of cord cross-wise about the priest's lean arm, so that the skin was patterned into lozenge-shape; then Simeon drew his kris and sliced away a lozenge. The priest never flinched, but kept his bright gaze steadily upon us while the blood flowed. I told the torturer I would have no more of it, and the great Jew turned furiously upon me.

"Mark me, once for all," says he, "I'll have no prating from you. I like you very well, my son, but if you cross me now, by the living Jehovah, I'll stab you where you stand."

At that, I dismounted my own weapon.

"Come now, this is but foolishness," said Simeon. "I promise you, the man shall not be hurt."

He turned again upon the priest, the steel shining in his hand; and the old man broke into a sudden torrent of speech.

"He will show us the way, he says," quoth Simeon.

We cut his bonds, and he led into the great chamber, drew aside the arras upon the wall at the end opposite to the doorway by which we had first entered, and vanished into a dark passage. We followed him, going down and

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down upon a rough path. There fell upon our ears a sullen noise, a roaring far below, the sob of driven water, and a heavy dropping as of rain; and a faint light, shining through holes which ran to the outer air, revealed the overhanging rocks and the yawning mouths of caverns and black abysses.

A little after, a larger light glimmered and increased, until we discerned the sea, all sparkling in the dawn, and came out upon a mighty pomp of sunrise. We stood in a narrow, rocky bay, whence the cliffs rose straight and high in a half-circle. Upon the horizon bristled the masts of a ship, little as a toy, which, as we hoped, was *The Virgin God Save Her*.

The old priest ran swiftly down the beach, and plunged into the surf. Stayed by the huge breaching of the sea, we watched his white head receding round the headland.

"Prettily cozened," said Simeon; and he began to walk to and fro along the beach. So he went for a long time; then he called me. He had a plan, he said. In that place I was to build and light the signal fire. If he did not return to the Temple before midnight, then was I to escape to the ship, for I should know the Messiah was dead.

Going back to the Temple, we heard the

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distant sound of barbarous music. The Festival had begun.

Gabriel Simeon mounted the steps of the throne, which was all of some red stone like marble, and there he sat, facing the great doors, with his hands upon his knees. I stood beside the doors, ready to lift the bar and swing the leaves open, hearkening to the shrilling music. Now it grew nearer; and again it died away, so that we heard the dreary shrieking of parrots in the garden without. We waited long; but the Golden Messiah sat as still as a graven image, aloft on his red throne.

At last the braying of trumpets and the roaring of gongs and the shouting grew louder and still louder, until the clamour beat about the walls. The Golden Messiah lifted his hand. I swung the doors inward, and looked through the crack of the hinge. There were the massy foreheads and little eyes of two elephants, with a thin brown man sitting on each of their heads, and each bearing a little golden castle on his back; and beyond the beasts was a multitude of brown faces and limbs and white garments. This I saw in one moment of time; the next, the Golden Messiah had arisen, and was descending the steps of his throne. A great shout went up,

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and swelled until the walls rang. The Messiah stood upon the threshold with arms uplifted ; there fell a sudden silence ; and, as when the wind sweeps over a field of standing corn, all the people bowed themselves with their foreheads to the ground. A huge gross man, swathed in dirty cloth-of-gold, climbed down from one of the elephants' gilded castles. He could bend no more than a barrel, so he cast himself on his belly, and his white hair fell about his dewlaps, as he rubbed his face in the dust.

The Golden Messiah let fall his arm, stepping forward ; one of the castled elephants kneeled down, and I shut and barred the doors upon the False Prophet ascending into his little golden castle. The music struck up with singing and crying, and I was left alone in the temple. The heathen never thought of making perquisition for their chief priest. All the day long I heard the noise of the barbarian music ; and all day long I travailed hard. I gathered great store of dry seaweed and withered herbage, and built and lighted the signal fire on the beach ; and towards evening the pinnace of *The Virgin God Save Her* hove in sight, and Captain Abel Gray came ashore with twenty men, all armed *cap-à-pie*. I told the captain that Mr Simeon

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was then with the King, that he would return (if he were alive) at nightfall, and that I would bring news of him thereafter.

Taking with me a torch from a store brought by the crew, I went back into the temple, there to await the return of the Prophet. Not until the night had fallen did I hear the sound of the savage revels grow louder and draw near once more. Torchlights flashed through the windows, and three blows, the Messiah's signal, were struck upon the door. I opened instantly: the tide of light and clamour flowed in; and for one moment the Messiah stood upon the threshold, confronting the tossing glare and the mass of faces, with arms uplifted, crying out upon them in their own tongue; the next, he was inside, and we were barring the door.

Gabriel Simeon called upon the name of his Maker, and cast himself face downwards upon the pavement. When I had kindled the torch, he sat up, and put off his golden mask. His dark face was flushed near to purple, his eyes were sunken in his head, his teeth were black with the betel nut.

"Is the fire lit?" said he, in a thick voice. "Is the boat come? Let me die—let me die, and go to my fathers."

He took a little vial from his clothes and

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drank the contents, and lay down, and slept like the Seven of Ephesus.

I sat and watched him there, until the moon rose and shone in patches on the wall. The patches changed their places, the noise of the Indians had long ceased, and there fell no sound but the frogs' crooning and the whisper of the wind, and still he slept.

"Art there, Chudleigh?" said the Golden Messias, at last; and his voice was the voice of a man in his right mind. "That's well. What news?"

I told him the crew of *The Virgin God Save Her* was waiting, and asked him of the day's history.

"Drink," said he. "Drink, first and last, and whoreson madness, and things unspeakable. But all's one for that. Now hearken to me, Chudleigh, and listen with the understanding, as you love life. To-night I am to die. And to-morrow they shall bury me in the Valley of Kings. I am not drunk, and the fever hath gone from me. This is the way of it."

The King (said he) would not tell his secret, the secret of the Kings' Burial-ground—no, not even to Messias. Finding him fixed in this obstinacy, the Messias told the King that his time on earth ended that day; and that

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during the night he should die again, and go to Paradise, leaving his mortal coil in the temple. And he demanded of the King, as conferring inestimable honour upon His Majesty, that his body should be buried at dawn in the Valley of Kings. To this the King eagerly consented, saying that himself should bring the Prophet to his grave. Now, during his sojourn in India, Gabriel Simeon, as he told me, had learned of the conjurers many things, and among them, the art of feigning death ; so that, for as long as a week, he could remain to all appearance as dead as a bone. Finishing his explication, the mad Jew gave me a string of orders, which (as will be seen) I straitly carried out ; then he took the torch and vanished into the passage leading to the women's apartments. Much disquieted, I lay down to sleep ; but the sun had not risen before I was awakened by Gabriel Simeon. He mounted to his chair, swallowed somewhat from a vial—the man carried an apothecary's shop in his clothes—and with I know not what convulsion, his head fell back and he ceased to breathe. As I live by bread, I thought him gone indeed.

Howbeit, I unbarred the doors, according as the Messiah had commanded, and withdrew behind the arras to see the end. In a while I

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heard the padding of naked feet, and peering through a little hole, I beheld the fat man dressed in dirty cloth-of-gold, who had lighted down yestermorn from one of the elephant-castles, and who was doubtless the King. With him were six white-clad slaves, carrying a bier. They made but little work of it ; and had the reliques of the Golden Messias out of his chair, and laid upon the bier, before one might count a score. The King, having barred the door with his own hands, led the way through the middle doorway of the three inner doorways, followed by the six slaves bearing the corpse. I dogged the funeral train from one room to the next, and thence into an opening in the wall of the third room. The walls had seemed solid enough when the Messias and myself had explored the chamber. But there it was, a strait passage hewn in the rock and lighted not at all ; and up, and still up, uneven stairs, in the cold wet heart of the rock, I crept behind the bier, until a tiny light glimmered far ahead. So soon as the bearers were out in the open, I stole to the end of the passage, and peered out from behind a piece of rock ; and lo ! there was a dusky valley, no bigger than the deck of a great ship, curved like a spoon, with black hills mounting high above and leaning inwards on every side. The

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topmost rocks were touched with the gold of sunrise ; and golden tombstones, gleaming in the shadow, studded the floor of the valley. The slaves were digging and delving with their hands in the grey, powderous soil ; and even as I looked one rolled over, writhed, and lay still. They had been poisoned beforehand. The bulky King stood with his back to me, watching the slaves toiling and dying. A second and a third slave tumbled in the dust ; and the three that remained were dragging the bier towards the open grave, when I ran forth. I came up behind the King and pricked him on the bare shoulder. His Majesty spun round with a cry, and I stabbed him to the heart—thrice, to make sure of him. The three slaves, uttering broken sounds, stood holding and swaying together above the open grave, staring upon me. I kneeled beside the dead Messiah, and pierced his skin with a tiny instrument, injecting a certain drug ; then I plucked away his golden mask, loosened his clothes, and pillowed his head upon my knee ; and presently his waxen cheek flushed faintly, his eyes opened and looked into mine, and with a strong shuddering he came to himself. I gave him to drink out of another vial, and in a few minutes he could move and stand.

The slaves lay still beside the King, twined

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and twisted upon themselves. On every side were massy golden stones, encrusted with jewels.

Simeon, staggering to his feet, pulled at a tombstone, but he could not move it. So he dropped upon his knees, and began to scrape away the sand with his hands. Together we disinterred the dry body of an Indian, lying clad in his barbarous armour, with his weapons by his side. Armour and weapons were set with gold and gems. The body was light as a straw mammet ; I took it on my back, and, with Simeon reeling under another burthen, we came to the temple, and thence to the seashore, where we found the mariners from *The Virgin God Save Her*. Up the passage we led the crew, with array of torches, across the echoing temple, up the second passage, out into the silent valley, where great birds of prey were circling already above the rocks. The men tore up the golden stones and unearthed the jewelled carcasses ; and, laden to the dust, the train went down again to the seashore. Once more we returned, when, coming into the temple for the second time, we heard the shouting and the murmur of a great concourse without the walls. The mariners gathered together, asking what it meant ; and Gabriel Simeon, who was now his own man again,

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softly unbarred the door and looked through a tiny opening. He shut to the door, and turned to the company with an altered countenance.

"They are making a great fire," said he. "They will burn the women—I never thought of that—they will burn my mort alive."

Alone of the company I understood his words. Since the Prophet was dead, his wives must be burned alive, as the custom was; and this I swiftly expounded to the ship's company.

Some cried one thing and some another; but the most of the adventurers declared they would never risk their necks for a parcel of heathen wenches: if Mr Gabriel Simeon had passed his day ashore in courting every light-skirts on the island, 'twas his affair, not theirs.

"What! I have made you all rich, and you would leave a poor maid to burn, like a crew of bloody Spanish Inquisidors?" the Jew cried. "If I get the wench—if I can get the girl, I say, and bring her within—will ye carry her to the boat, while I bar the doors?"

To this they presently agreed; and the men were set in a chain, reaching from the temple door to the mouth of the passage leading down to the shore, ready to pass the wench from hand to hand.

Once again I threw back the doors of the

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temple, and once again the Messiah stood upon the threshold. We stood a short flight of steps above the open space in front of the building. Beneath us was a multitude of Indians, forming a hollow square, in the midst of which was a stack of wood. Beside the funeral pyre stood a wench dressed all in white, and bound with cords. Simeon had forgotten his golden mask, and his brown face stared out of his yellow beard. A cry went up from the people; and, as he swiftly approached them, the crowd gave way before him on either side, and some prostrated themselves. Simeon came straightway to the girl and caught her up, and, despite his burthen, he had reached the foot of the steps before the Indians knew what he would be at. I caught the wench from him, ran up the steps, and heaved her inwards, and one took her from me. As I turned, the mob was rushing upon its Messiah. I had time, in that moment, to clap to the doors, but, had I done so, I must have shut out Gabriel Simeon. For the Indians had closed about the Messiah where he stood upon the steps, crowding between him and the open door. Then something smote my sight, so that I was blinded. The spell or seizure passed; for one moment I saw all moving about me, swelled and monstrous; the next, all things

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shrank to their natural proportions. The Messiah was gone, and the mob began suddenly to run, giving tongue like hounds. They ran directly down the ruined garden, scattering in and out the groves and bushes. Beyond the garden, a green field ascended upon the lower slopes of a rocky hill, which ran up sheer into the sky. Upon the green I beheld a white speck moving, and I knew the speck must be Gabriel Simeon. Doubtless he had put the trick of Indian magic upon us, whereby one holds in his power the senses of all those about him for a moment ; and so he had slipped from the crowd.

The white speck gained the rocky crest, as the Indians spread upon the green space below. But I could see what Simeon could not—that a precipice ran down upon his right hand ; so that, unless he could descend upon the other side of the hill, the Indians were driving him into a corner. The white speck ran to and fro on the edge of the cleft, slipped away to the left hand, came out upon the sky-line—a little figure no bigger than a fly—and ran to and fro again. Then the tiny figure vanished over the edge.

As for me, I fled incontinent to the shore, and came to it as the pinnace was putting off, laden to the water's edge. A piece of white

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lay at the foot of the dark rocks ; and I cried out to the crew that they should not leave the body of Gabriel Simeon to the savages. So we carried him aboard the boat, where was his wench, and the fragments of the Indian kings, and the tables of gold ; and so we came aboard *The Virgin God Save Her*. Immediately we set sail for England. The Sumatrans sent two long war-galleys to pursue us ; but, having no better stomach for our shot than at first, they presently turned back again.

Poor Gabriel Simeon was broken in pieces by his fall ; but his head was marred but little, and I had it embalmed. His body we committed to the deep ; and although he was a Jew, Captain Gray gave him Christian burial.

The Indian wench we carried with us ; but one night, when we were anchored over against one of the Maldivé Islands with intent to procure wood and water, she swam ashore and left us—perhaps a wise escape.

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BEYOND the flashing, changing hills of water that rolled in the frothy wake of the little *Trades' Increase*, rose a spot of blue-black cloud, widening swiftly, drawing upward like a curtain across the intolerable brightness of the tropic sky. In the belly of the cloud, a white sail glimmered aslant, like a dagger on a bravo's cloak. Far over the starboard bow of the *Trades' Increase*, a long low hump of green broke the line of the horizon. With what appeared to be a pirate schooner coming up hand over hand on the quarter, the pirates' island of Tortuga, menacing on the beam, and the rest of the little expedition, the *Hopewell* and the *Plow*, hull-down and beyond the reach of signals, the *Trades' Increase* was like to have a pinch for life. Voyaging from London to the new colony of St Kitts, the adventurers had never meant to drop so far to the southward; they had intended to steer north of the Bahamas, giving a wide berth to the pirate-haunted

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coasts of Hispaniola and Tortuga, Puertorico and Jamaica; but, in the year of grace 1627, the seaman who fetched up within thirty miles of his destination, reckoned himself no mean navigator; and what with shifting winds and uncharted currents, 'twas more in dismay than surprise, that the expedition raised Tortuga instead of the North-Grand-Caicos in the Bahamas.

The Captain of the *Trades' Increase* reflected gloomily that, to carry on as he was, would be to drive the ship under, so soon as the squall struck her; while to shorten sail would be to give advantage to the hunting hound astern.

He decided to compromise. The men were stationed at their ropes, alow and aloft; arms were served out to the dozen passengers, men and women alike; and the gunners stood beside the four little falcons, their matches burning. By this time, sky and sea were darkened, and a wall of rain and spindrift was sweeping down upon them. The master was half-a-second too late with his orders; the squall broke upon the ship with a shrieking and a great noise and smother of water; and the mainmast shot down over the side with a crack like the report of a gun. The storm swept away to leeward, leaving the

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Trades' Increase staggering and deluged in the trough of the seas; mast, yards and a tangle of rigging all adrift alongside, the spars battering at her side as she rolled. The sun shone out with a beautiful unconsciousness, the rays glinting on the axe blades as the crew fought to cut loose the wreckage, and gleaming on the white sails hoisting gaily on the ship astern. The wreck was cleared—the foresail and mizzen hoisted—the men piped to quarters—and there, alongside, was the buccaneer within pistol-shot. As she rolled towards them, once, the men of the *Trades' Increase* remarked a line of musketeers posted along the bulwarks; and as she rolled towards them, again, a crackle of firing broke out. On the *Trades' Increase*, the helmsman fell, the ship ran up into the wind, and the Captain, leaping upon the rail, desperately waved his handkerchief, and hoped for the best. One of the passengers, a man of great stature, with fair hair curling on his shoulders, who was standing on the poop, sword in hand, eyed this manœuvre with much disfavour.

“We had better by half have fought it out as we are,” said he. “It must come to fighting.”

The black-browed young woman at his side made no answer. She was watching the

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pirate ship, which had skimmed away at the signal of surrender; and, going about, revealed the legend *Roebuck* written in gold on her stern gallery. The *Roebuck* ran swiftly down upon the *Trades' Increase*, the crew gathered at the side, ready with grappling irons.

"But I don't mean to die at all, Gerard," said the girl with the meeting eyebrows, as the ships locked together. A tide of armed sailors flooded upon the *Trades' Increase*, where the crew stood crowded sulkily in the waist; and up to the poop came a little fierce man in a steel corslet, with peacocks' feathers in his hat.

"Sir," says he to the Captain, "I accept your surrender—sir, you are wise to make it. I am Captain Bartholomew Hawes. Let us to business. I take"—he pointed a thick finger at the black-browed lady—"I take that pretty bona-roba."

The girl's dagger flashed in her hand, but she was thrust aside, as her tall husband held the little man with the peacocks' feathers, at the point of his four-foot rapier. Afterwards, Mr Gerard Middleton remembered no more of the scene than a glitter and clash of blades, the sting of a cut across his forehead, a red rain falling into his eyes, through which

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he beheld the dreadful appealing face of his wife, and a sudden curtain of darkness dropped upon sight and sense.

Someone bandaged his head, and left him lying propped against the bulwarks, while the buccaneers went about their work with a furious despatch. All the women aboard were first transhipped, Mistress Middleton being consigned to the cabin of Captain Hawes, under charge of a sentry; then, the cargo of the emigrant ship—shirts, stockings, shoes, ploughs, knives, cheese, wax, thread, and (best of all) a butt of English beer—was hoisted from the hold, the surrendered crew being compelled to bear a hand at the sword's point; the cabins were despoiled of furniture and clothes; and the whole contents of the *Trades' Increase* having been transferred to the *Roebuck*, the buccaneer sheered off. Destitute of provisions and water, the *Trades' Increase* had no resource save to run for the nearest land; so the Captain made what sail he could, and steered for Tortuga Island, what time the tropic dark came down at a stride.

The wounded man was carried ashore; where the Tortugans received the party with rough kind hospitality. Here, dwelling in sun-baked huts, thatched with palm leaves, clustered in the clearings of the thick forest,

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were English, French, Dutch, Turks, Greeks, Moors, and negroes ; men of all nations, save the Spanish ; hunters of the wild cattle and wild boar, and professional buccaneers, the Brethren of the Coast.

“ Bartholomew Hawes is none of us,” said old Saltonstall, an elder among the Brotherhood. “ You may see that, by the way he seized upon Mistress Middleton, instead of waiting for the division of plunder—a most illegal captain. What ! None of the Brethren truck with English ships, or French, or Dutch, save in the way of friendly quarrel or so. We have enough to do with the fleets of King Philip the Spoiler.”

This was news to the strangers ; who entertained the popular delusion that a pirate was a pirate, without invidious distinction ; and they dwelt amicably among the Brethren, until some found opportunity to take ship, some joined the hunters of Tortuga, and some sailed as buccaneers. But Gerard Middleton lay sick with fever, blind and helpless in his stifling room, tended by Mistress Joan Fuller, the stout half-caste lady who kept the “ Mermaid ” tavern. In a while, his fever left him, and his wound, healed into a livid scar, running from the right temple across the brows to the left cheek-bone. His sight was quite

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gone; and always before his mental vision hung the picture, beheld through a red rain, of the face of his wife, Elizabeth; the black brows knotted, the wide eyes appealing, the red lips parted. Before that picture, as before a shrine, the blind man solemnly built a sacrificial offering of vengeance; day and night he fed the flame; and always his mind, shut in the dark room of his blindness, went up and down and to and fro, devising new ways of slaying Captain Bartholomew Hawes. Mr Middleton burned the ravisher at the stake; a device which naturally presented itself to Middleton, as a Catholic; a satisfactory, but somewhat impracticable method. There was flogging to death; that process had its fascination; there were the rack, the boot, the thumbscrews, all pleasant to contemplate: hanging, running through with a sword, drowning, hurling from a high place—but, these were all too kindly swift. Mr Middleton reflected, bitterly, that tortures the most lingering and furious, were but a breath long, compared with the abiding pains to which he himself was condemned. This consideration brought him to speculate upon the possibility of securing eternal torment to Captain Hawes. That the buccaneer should own the slightest chance of eventual escape from purgatory,

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appeared intolerable to Mr Middleton. And he would not disguise from himself, that the archangel in charge of those fires, might be induced to accept some plea or palliation, some series of masses, a bundle of indulgences, a misdirected intercession, which to Mr Middleton's practical mind, would be absurdly inadequate. Could he not extend his revenge, from the futility of this world, to the sublime efficiency of the next? And if so, how? As he sat in the shade in the daytime, his broad hat shading the white face with the quivering eyelids, slashed across with red; as he lay long awake at night, hearkening to the croak of the myriad frogs, which sounded like the croon of many skates on ice, far away at home, and the eternal thunder of the surf, he was for ever toiling at this problem. The nearer question, of how he was to live, troubled him constantly: although it seemed merely impossible that he should by any means die, with his purpose unfulfilled. But, the matter must be dealt with; he could not continue to accept alms.

Meanwhile, evening after evening, as the Tortugans assembled about the tavern, a gaunt figure felt its way round the mud wall, turning its head this way and that, the sightless face now illumined by the blue sheen of the moon-

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light, and again glimmering white in the shadow.

"Is anyone home from the sea? Hath anyone news?" the figure would inquire, stopping, with head thrust forward, listening for the answer; and still, evening by evening, there was never a buccaneer who had heard aught of the *Roebuck*.

"What, sir," old Saltonstall would say, soothingly, "you must brace up, you must have patience. Sure, bully Hawes will come swashbuckling ashore, one of these days—so he will, sure as sunrise."

The blind man felt his way to the bench beside the door, and sat down, turning his face seaward, where a gold path of moonlight shimmered across the long smooth heave of the waters.

"Good friends, I wish you would tell me how I am to live like an honest man, in the meantime," said he, dully.

"Why, on beef and rumbullion, pork and mobbie, like the rest of us," said someone, cheerfully.

"Have you never had a blind man, wanting work for bread, among you before?" asked Middleton.

"There was Abraham Bunce, boatswain of the *Little Susan*—he lost his deadlights a-try-

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ing to board the great carrack off Cartagena," said Saltonstall. "And what did he? Why, he being paid two hundred pieces of eight—a hundred for each eye, d'ye see—he purchased a butt of wine of Oporto, and drank it to the bottom, and blew himself up with gunpowder—did Bunce. Not that the application lays towards you, Mr Middleton," added the narrator, apologetically.

Across the silence which ensued upon this helpful anecdote, rang the thin, querulous wail of a child.

"That is Thomas Sharp's doxie's baby," remarked Mistress Fuller, in her clipped half-caste English. "It is very sick. It is a pity it will die unchristened—the spirit will not rest."

"Why, so it is. I've always said there should be a chaplain aboard here," said Saltonstall—"a kind of universal chaplain, sailing under all flags, like his flock. Not so much for marriages; but for christenings, and deaths, and divine service on Sunday, and blessing the expeditions when they cut sail."

"And could you not become chaplain, Mr Middleton?" says the brown woman, quickly.

"Why, now, 'tis an inspiration of the tapstress!" cried Saltonstall. "A priest can do his duty equally blind or seeing, so he can—

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and here's the billet open for him. Pity 'tis you are a Catholic, Mr Middleton, for we are mostly Protestants here—but a man must be as he is born, I say, and so as you are entered of the Brethren, there will be no harm."

But Middleton was reflecting with gratitude that he was of the Roman persuasion. For here, indeed, was both a means of passably honest livelihood, and a way to extend his vengeance into the burning halls of purgatory. Endowed with the Church's authority, he had the sinner bound and helpless.

"But I am only a layman, and no priest at all as yet," said he. "How can I find a bishop to receive such as I am?"

"A bishop? An archbishop—cardinal—Pope, if you will, sir," said Saltonstall. "If a Spaniard will serve your turn, there's bishops enow crossing the Caribbean, and a college of bishops, going to and fro to New Spain, with their crosses and jewels and silver biers, every my lord worth the ransom of a province. We'll catch you a bishop, Mr Middleton, if that be all."

There was a pleased murmur of assent from the assembled buccaneers. And within a month, an angry and bewildered ecclesiastic was standing, amid an interested crowd of pirates, in front of a blind man with a scarred

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white face, who was gravely demanding, in bad Latin, the charge and office of the priesthood.

An idea occurred to the Bishop. "Aha," said he, "you are of the Spanish party in England, is it not? You would help us?" But the aspirant sternly replied that he expected the Bishop to deal with the matter as a Churchman, without reference to nationality. Whereupon the prelate, who had the strictest views on ecclesiastical polity, was at a loss what to think of the matter. It seemed to him that these English renegadoes, dogs, and blasphemers were setting a snare for his sacred feet.

"His reverence hangs in the wind," said the captain of the ship which had captured the Bishop's galleon, impatiently. "Ask him, will he, or will he not? Tell him, there is none but fair dealing toward." To the mind of this simple buccaneer, the making of a priest was a process as summary as the conferring of knighthood. "If he will, he shall be set ashore, safe and whole, in Havana; if he will not, he shall go down quick into hell, by the road of those tortures which we have learned of the Inquisition."

Middleton translated impassively. The ecclesiastic's dark face hardened into obstin-

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acy. This thing was against all precedent; his duty towards Holy Church. . . .

The Bishop did not lack resolution; but after a couple of minutes with a piece of burning tow between his fingers, he began to perceive weighty arguments upon the other side of the question. Moreover, anything which was done by him under compulsion, would easily be nullified at headquarters. He signified his willingness to renew the discussion on a conditional basis of assent. Upon inquiry, it appeared that there was a small chapel, attached to the castle built by the first Spanish colonists, whose broken walls and battered turrets crowned the cliff, above the village by the roadstead; and thither a solemn procession conducted the Bishop and the neophyte. The Bishop consecrated some water, and therewith consecrated the building in seven places in case the sacred fane had been at any time desecrated; then the procession, satisfied that the Bishop meant to perform his duty, returned to the "Mermaid" and refreshed itself. The Bishop and Mr Middleton dined together in private; and by the end of the meal, they began to understand each other.

The Bishop remained in Tortuga for several weeks, living on the best in the island, and

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teaching Gerard Middleton his craft, stage by stage. Then he blessed him, and the buccaneers carried him to Havana, and set him ashore with a gift of a jewelled cross worth a thousand ducats.

Every day, the new priest, affectionately called by his flock the Abbot of Tortuga, said mass in his chapel; sometimes he was alone, sometimes he had a small congregation. Then he tapped his way down to the "Mermaid," received the news of ships coming in or sailing out, and went about among the huts, exercising his kindly office as best he might. The hunters embellished his chapel with the skins of beasts; the buccaneers hung a ship's bell in the broken turret, decorated the chancel with tabernacles, tall candlesticks, and pictures, and the Abbot with rich vestments, taken from Spanish ships. When the Abbot was lonely, or thirsty, he rang his bell; and someone was sure to come. And Mistress Joan Fuller was continually about his quarters, contributing not a little to his comfort; and no one was scandalised in that easy community. Once, the blind Abbot, when he had been two years in his office, had news of Captain Bartholomew Hawes. Some French colonists, driven from St Kitts by a Spanish expedition, and taking refuge in Tortuga, reported that the

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General (or as we should say, Admiral) was one Bartholomew Hawes. But the Abbot could gain no news of his lost wife. The new colonists so heightened the prosperity of the island, that the French Governor-General of the Indies transferred his seat of government to Tortuga ; and, taking up his quarters in the castle, repaired that picturesque court of guard, as they called the fortification. The Abbot retained his lodging in the place ; and the Governor-General used to worship in his chapel. Next to his Excellency, the stout priest became the most potent personage in the island.

So year followed year ; the buccaneers prospering and multiplying ; the ships setting out upon the tide, blessed by the Abbot ; and setting in again, loaded with plunder ; the crews singing as they rowed ashore to fling away their gains in few days' furious orgie. And the blind Abbot grew corpulent in body ; and, to all appearance, quiet in mind. But, never a day passed, that he did not awake to the remembrance of the face of his wife Elizabeth, beheld for the last time, through the red rain falling into his eyes. At first, his quivering fancy followed her into the pirate ship ; he saw her, clear as a picture, in the cabin, and the little red man with the peacocks' feathers . . . and what he looked upon, then, used to arouse a most unholy thirst

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for vengeance. But, after a while (since these things were done and over) he came to regard his imaginings with a still and sombre indignation, that dwelt in him like a dark fire. But, he no longer dallied with alluring details of lingering torment in the manner of slaying his enemy; so as he were by when Captain Bartholomew came to give up the ghost, he would be content; for he was able, now, to condemn the pirate to an everlasting sojourn in the fiery pit reserved by St Peter for the damned of Holy Church.

Seven years had gone since the worthy Bishop had departed; when, one evening, he appeared mysteriously from nowhere. None had seen him arrive; he must have landed secretly on the farther side of the island, and made his way through the woods.

"My friend," said he to the Abbot of Tortuga, "I bring you news. They are good or bad, as may appear to you. 'Tis not long since I met and talked with Bartholomew Hawes."

"Ah," said the blind man, without apparent emotion. "And where is he?"

"Not far away," replied the Bishop. "And, I think," he added, "he is likely to draw nearer. I came, indeed, to warn you. To forewarn you, my friend," repeated the Bishop, slowly.

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The Abbot digested this intelligence, in silence. "Have you no other news?" said he, presently.

"A natural question," returned the prelate, lightly. "Now, as one priest to another, we may discuss freely. What is done, is done. Is it not so? Well, the man Hawes comes with one who is called his wife—one whom you knew."

The burly man sat silent, waiting for more.

"I assure you, my friend, the lady is very well known to many—many in high places. She hath intelligence—she is a woman to be reckoned with. . . . Shall I tell you her story, so far as I have learned it?"

The still figure signified assent.

"I take this English pirate, Hawes, to be a kind of man common among the buccaneers; ferocious, yet with a streak of kindly nature; with the courage of a bull, swift in action, yet stupid withal. Conceive, my friend, such a one shut up in a small barque with a woman fierce as himself, and clever as he is stupid; he had, I think, a foretaste of the hereafter, for a while. Remark, now, the sequel. Bartholomew Hawes must even quit his trade; and you are to conceive my lady dwelling in a fine house in the town of San Juan de Goave, in Hispaniola, while bully Hawes cruises in

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command of a guarda-costa. Ay, she made him join with us—with the Spanish party. 'Twas she, by art and craft of diplomacy, gained Hawes the command of the Brazilian expedition, which cleared St Kitts of the heretics, seven years since. In that seven years, she buried five children in the black fever-earth of Hispaniola; yet she ceased not to plot and cabal, to the end that dull Hawes should rise in the world. She hath gained her desire—insomuch that Captain Hawes of the *Roebuck*, wolf's head, outlawed pirate, is in fact Governor of Tortuga to-day."

The narrator paused, and, going to the door, looked out to seaward.

"He must needs take the island, first," said the Abbot.

"Ay," said the Bishop, softly. "But he will take it." On the heels of his words, there fell the sudden, dull boom of a gun fired at sea, near at hand.

"And I think," added the Bishop, as the blind man started to his feet, "he is about the business now."

Another gun sounded—another, and another. Drums beat, and trumpets called with a startling clamour in the castle, close at hand. Below in the village, arose a tumult of cries; and a confused noise of firing presently broke

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out. The few soldiers who garrisoned the castle, tramped past the dark doorway where stood the two churchmen. Their drums were rolling, their matches were burning, as they hurried down the steep pathway to the shore. The blind man quivered to the drum-beat, as the hot odour of burning cotton struck him in the face. He turned, and groped for his great staff. The Bishop laid a thin brown hand on the other's massive arm.

"My friend," said the prelate, "I neglected, perhaps, to tell you, that (however unworthy) I am Bishop of Tortuga this night, under seal from the Archbishop of New Spain. And so it comes about, even (under God) from the intrigues of a certain lady, that I bid you, as your spiritual superior, to remain within doors——"

The Bishop of Tortuga had the breath choked in his throat before he could continue.

"You would give me orders, you rat of Spain!" said the Abbot. "You shall see how I reverence my spiritual superior."

The Bishop was lifted bodily from his feet, roughly shaken, and carried forth to the edge of the cliff; so that for a freezing moment he beheld the great flashing stars reflected far down in the dark bosom of the deep.

"But I shall stay here, because I am

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blind, and because I have business," said the Abbot.

He dropped the Bishop bodily on the ground so that the episcopal heels projected into mid-air; and that terrified ecclesiastic crawled swiftly on his hands and knees across the causeway and into the room, and flung to and bolted the door. The Abbot went into the chapel, where the tapers burned on the altar, and sat down to wait the issue. His nine years' vigil seemed but as a day, compared with the next three hours of suspense. During this agitated period, Governor Hawes succeeded in scattering the unprepared Tortugans, and those of the buccaneers who were not slain, escaped into the woods. Governor Hawes had his formidable lady brought ashore with music of hautboys; and, escorted by a guard of pikemen and musketeers, the two ascended the steep path to the castle; where the Governor proposed to take his ease after an extremely arduous combat. The Governor looked in at the chapel door, in passing; and, seeing in the dimness only a large priest standing beside the altar, apparently engaged in prayer, his Excellency crossed himself and went on, deciding to postpone a thanksgiving service until the morrow.

The Bishop of Tortuga, who supped with

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the Governor and his lady, had reasons of his own for saying nothing about the Abbot; and after the meal, his lordship withdrew to his chamber. Weary as he was, shaken and bruised, the Bishop had no mind to sleep; he sat reading, by the light of a candle; lifting his eyes from his book with a start, at every little sound.

The Governor and his lady sat over their wine, in the rich apartment of the dispossessed Frenchman.

"Now is not this better," said the gaunt, black-browed woman, with the fierce hawk-face, "than the old way? Getting riches with one hand, flinging them to Jews, Turks, and bona-robas with the other, and ending a blind beggar tapping the streets for alms, or a sun-dried piece of carrion swinging in the wind on Gallows' Point—such was the way of it, but nine years since, my —, your Excellency."

"Ay, we have not done altogether amiss," responded Governor Hawes, comfortably stretching his legs. "There is none cleverer than you, my lady, in all New Spain, I swear it. And what credit, then, to me, for that I perceived your marvellous qualities at a glance, and took them all, at a blow—in the old way, but nine years since. Ay, in these

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very waters, too. 'Twas off Tortuga, sure enough, that we sighted the *Trades' Increase*, bearing——”

“Speak not of it,” said the lady, quickly.

“Why not? 'Twas the lucky day of our lives,” the Governor obtusely continued. “Had it not been for bully Hawes, you would have been slaving as the wife of a common planter, and poor Bartholomew, as you say, kicking heels in a rope, very likely. Do you think I am ashamed——”

“I know you better,” broke in Mistress Elizabeth. “But I would not tempt my luck too far, if I were you—and that is what you are doing.”

“As you will,” said the Governor, who had long ago acquired the habit of obedience. “Fill your glass, sweet chuck—we may at least drink to the future——”

“What is that?” cried the lady, with a violent start.

Beside the door, in the shadow, stood a great figure, with a priest's cowl drawn low over the face.

“Bartholomew Hawes, I have somewhat to say to you,” said the Abbot of Tortuga; and so wild, triumphant, and menacing was his tone, that even the buccaneer was thrilled. He sprang to his feet. As for the lady she

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sat staring at the apparition, the colour fading from her face.

"A priest?" said the Governor. "Sir, what do you here?" he demanded, but not roughly; for Bartholomew Hawes had learned the expediency of politeness towards the clergy.

"I come," said the Abbot, his great voice rising in volume as he went on, "to tell you that your hour is come. Dog, murderer, coward, you have no more place for repentance. Stay," he cried, lifting a great hand, "stir not a single hand—raise no alarm—or I will break you across my knee. Nine years your sin has hunted you, to drag you down at last. Hearken." And with uplifted hand, the Abbot of Tortuga pronounced the terrible curse of the Church, provided (as the phrase went) for Enormous Offences. He blasted his enemy from the hair of his head to the soul of his foot; he cursed him in sitting, lying, standing, going; in eating, drinking, and sleeping; he condemned to hell everyone who should give him food, or shelter, or service; and, finally, he formally sentenced the Governor to burn in the lake of fire for ever and ever. When he had done, there was a little silence, through which sounded the rumour of the sea, without, far below.

"'Tis a madman," said Hawes. His voice

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was hoarse, shaking : he leaned his hands on the table, bending forward. No man of the Roman religion (however lax his tenets) could hear the great curse unmoved, in those days. "Who—who is it?"

With a great cry, the woman caught up the lamp and held it high. The shadowy figure stepped into the circle of light; its cowl fell back, disclosing the big face, scarred and with drooping, tremulous eyelids, of him who was once Gerard Middleton. The lamp dropped on the floor, and Mistress Elizabeth turned away, covering her face with her hands. Hawes, trusting in his foe's blindness, made a step towards his sword and pistols, which he had thrown aside before supper. But the giant heard him move, and reached for him, so that Hawes had but just time to twist away. He fled across the room, leaving his weapons, and followed by the blind man, to the door by which the priest had entered. It was locked. The buccaneer, desperately dodging his huge pursuer, who seemed to be gifted with some devilish faculty of seeing without sight, dived for the door in the opposite wall. He tore it open, and fled along the covered way leading from the Governor's house (which stood in the centre of the irregular courtyard) to the other covered way leading from one

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guard-house to the next, all round the high ramparts. Down the passage, barred with moonlight and shadow, ran the buccaneer, the thud of his pursuer's soft-shod feet close at his heels; up and down little flights of stone steps, through strange chambers, again along a corridor, into the next guard-house, and into an upper room. Here, Hawes had time to bolt the door; only to behold it driven inwards with a crash of flying splinters; whereupon, he slipped like an eel behind the blind man's back, and fled again. Run as he might, his feet lagged, as in a dreadful dream; and in his mind he saw the monstrous form, like nothing human, of the avenger, whom nothing could turn aside. More interminable corridor, shifting shadow and moonshine, stone stairs, nests of little rooms—at last he seemed to be gaining; and there (blessed sight) was an open doorway leading into the courtyard. . . .

The Bishop of Tortuga, reading in his room in the Governor's house, thought he heard small, muffled cries, and an intermittent sound of rapid footsteps. He opened his door, and looked into the passage. All was quiet. He went to the window, and leaned on the sill, looking down into the courtyard. The moonlight shone broad upon a bay of the covered

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corridor, which ran cloister-wise round the courtyard; and a blot of darkness marked a doorway. A tall figure glided suddenly from the shadow into the light, and stood opposite the doorway, in an attitude of tense expectation; the head craning forward, the arms slightly bent, the knees a little bowed. The Bishop regarded the priest of his creation with a profound interest. Presently, there came a swift slither of footsteps; and another figure, small and round, ran with lowered head from out the doorway, straight into the arms of the blind giant. The scream of a man in panic terror, rang sudden and startling, to be choked on the instant. The Bishop, leaning from his window, saw the two figures locked together, saw the smaller wrestler bent suddenly backward, saw his head loll on the shoulders. "So much for the English Governor," said the Bishop, and slipped downstairs, barefoot. When he reached the courtyard, he perceived the shadowy figure of the blind man ascending the steps to the ramparts, bearing on his back a limp body, with dangling arms and head. The composite figure loomed darkling against the night sky, blotting a little space of stars, as the good Bishop stole up the steps. As he emerged upon the platform,

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the giant was in the act of heaving his dead foe into the sea that murmured ninety feet below. The buccaneer had scarce struck the water, his slayer was still in the attitude of one listening, when the Bishop, stealing behind the blind man, thrust him outward. The giant tottered, flung up his arms, and toppled over the edge; so that the two enemies sank in the same spot.

"It is not well," said the Bishop, wringing the sweat from his sacred brow, "for an English dog to lay hands on his spiritual lord. Whose fingers, moreover," added his lordship, glancing at them, "are scarred by burning matches." He began to walk quietly towards his chamber. There had been no alarm—all was still. "Nor is it well," said the Bishop, "for English Governors to presume to rule for Spain. Their occupation is like to be brief."

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YOU see me, William Crowby, who were Captain Martin Scroope's Boat-swain when afloat, and his general messenger when ashore; well, I seen it all, from the time the Captain landed from the *Wheel of Fortune* sloop to marry handsome Mademoiselle de Maricourt, the rich French planter's daughter. Soon after the marriage, the planter he died, and Madame come into the estate. She and the Captain, with little Miss Marceline, their daughter, took up their quarters in the big house; where a man-child was born to them; and that year the sugar-cane crop was blighted. I had cause to remember the failure of the crop, by reason of what happened afterwards. Madame and the Captain lived a disquieted and unhappy life in the beautiful Island, where was all that heart desired, for they could not agree together. Captain Scroope had been in the Guinea trade, and so was used to a roving life; and a brisk man gets naturally soured

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in a stone frigate. Moreover, while (I don't deny) a slaver-captain may make a good house mate, similarly (it's true), he may not.

When division first began betwixt the Captain and his wife, word was passed among the niggers as how 'twas the Obeah-Man's doings. But niggers is all swabs. I says, and I maintain, 'twas difference of temper; else Madame would have left the Island, too. Not but what the Obeah-Man had something to do with it.

The Captain had the Obeah-Man whipped for stealing sugar, and rightly so; and the next morning, the Captain found the Obeah-bottle in the verandah, containing the toad and the spider and the rusty nails of witchcraft. Captain Scroope he takes the witch-bottle in his hand, and finds the Obeah-Man overseeing in the plantation, and breaks the bottle over his head. The witch-doctor fled howling like a dog, with his hands to his blinded eyes, and I thought he were scuppered, for sure. But the niggers, what had tied the Obeah-Man to the triangles and laid it on, was dead in less than a week, poisoned, most like. And a fortnight or so after, when I come out in the early morning, there was the three white cocks' heads a-lying in the space of raked sand afore the verandah, with their

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beaks turned to the doorway ; and, as I took particular notice, there was no footmarks to show how they got there. The three cocks' heads, in nigger witch-language, means death, one head to each person. I swept 'em up, and I takes 'em straightway to Captain Scroope, as it might be on the quarter-deck, and "For goodness sake, sir," I says, "let's pull out of this here mess of swabs."

The skipper stares at me, brisk and fierce, as his manner was. "Crowby, you're scared," says he.

"I am, sir, and I take no shame," says I. "I am scared of the Obeah," says I. "There ain't a nigger on the Island would dare to disobey the Obeah, and deadly poison is what they mean."

"I will cut the hide off of every black on the estate, and shoot them after," says the Captain.

"And while you was about the job, the nurse would be a-doctoring Miss Marceline's rations," I says ; for 'twas her I had chief in my mind.

The skipper takes a turn to and fro, with his hair bristling and a worried look upon him.

"Sometimes I think I should like to get back to clean white people in a clean ship,

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"I'll not deny," said he. "But Madame would never leave the Island."

"Put it to her," I says. "And (if I might make so bold) put it to her smart."

And so he did, I reckon; for the same afternoon I heard the sounds of talk from the room where they two was together, and the sounds went to a tune that was not what you might call a soothing tune nor a pleasant one to hear. About sunset, the Captain called me into the house. There was a nigger about to carry up a jug of milk to Miss Marceline's nursery. The Captain ordered him into a room, and we came in and locked the door.

"Now," says the Captain to the nigger, Banana Joe his name was, "let me see you drink my health in that there jug of milk."

Banana Joe was a happy nigger in a general way, with a grin and a joking word for everyone; but I never see a nigger struck more miserable than Banana Joe in that moment.

"O no no sar," says he, "you not kill Joe, poor Banana Joe, not you, sar, and I tell you everything, sar."

He dropped on his knees and tried to catch hold of the skipper's coat, and fell a-weeping like a great child. The Obeah-Man had ordered him to put poison leaves in the milk.

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I fetched a couple of fathom of line, we lashed his legs and arms, and forced him to swallow the jugful. The Captain watched him die, quiet and very attentive, and it were a painful death. Before he was quite dead, a bright green growth, like green moss, spread over the lower part of his face, most horrible to see.

"Boatswain," says the Captain, and the sound of his voice and the fashion of his countenance was changed, "Boatswain," says he, "go down to the jetty and prepare for sea, and dig out like hell, for we sails to-night."

I doubled down to the jetty, where the *Wheel of Fortune* lay (for the Captain bought her off the owners when he married) and by ten o'clock she were ready for sea. The Captain come down through the woods with the little girl in his arms.

"The crew all aboard, Crowby?" says he. "Then we'll cast off at the ebb."

There was two hours to wait the turn of the tide, and I kept wondering if Madame would come with the baby boy. The *Wheel of Fortune* swung at her anchor, the song of the frogs and lizards went on monotonous ashore, where the dark places was all speckled with the fire-flies, and that were all. She never come; but as we passed the sandy spit that runs out

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beyond the harbour, I see, by the light of a wondrous great moon, a figure standing on the shore. I thought I saw it wave its arms once, in a mournful kind of a signal; but we was drawing away very swift; and the figure was lost in the dark, and only the white tops of the mountains was visible above the black woodlands.

Thus Madame and her son were marooned, in a manner of speaking; but the Island was her home; she were born on the estate, and grew up amid the niggers and the snakes and the gorgeous trees and flowers; and the niggers they fairly worshipped her, to all appearance. I thought to myself that a cruise apart might mend matters betwixt the Captain and his lady, and so all were for the best.

Before we'd been many days at sea, the child she was shipmates with every soul aboard, and venturesome as a boy. With her yellow hair all tumbling about her, she would play about the decks and go aloft like a kitten. Right up to the main-t'-gallant cross-trees she climbed one day, and there she nestled, swung to and fro across the blue, shining and airy like a little spirit. "Leave her be," says the Captain; and he hails the child, and she comes down careful and safe as any seaman.

When we fetched up at Liverpool, the

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Captain took the child to the house of his sister, Miss Deborah Scroope, and I went with him to carry the gear along.

"What's your name, child?" asks Miss Deborah (for she and the Captain had been long parted).

"Marceline," says the child, which were her mother's name, too.

"That will never do for me," says her little old aunt, shaking her side curls. "I must call you something English. Martha, now, Martha is a good name, child, and comes from the Bible; and what is good enough for Bible Saints is good enough for you and me, my dear."

And Martha she were, so long as Miss Deborah lived.

Captain Scroope he took to the sea again, and embarked in the Guinea trade, transporting the niggers to the West Indies. Among all the Grandy King Georges, and Ephraim John Ottos, and John Robin Johns, and Robin John Robins—for such names all the petty nigger kings puts on like so many pairs of breeches, head first—among all that rascally crew, none was better known than Captain Martin Scroope and the *Wheel of Fortune*, and, I make bold to say, Will'm Crowby, Boatswain, what did a little trading on his own account, for the Captain allowed me a share in

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the cargo of Manchester and Indian fabrics, such as maniloes, romalls, niccanies, cushtaes, photacs, chelloes, and Guinea stuffs in general, with brass and copper ware, cutlery, and a musket or two, which we bartered for prime negroes with Grandy King George and Company. So, for six long years, fair weather or foul, blow high or blow low, the *Wheel of Fortune* ran betwixt Old Calabar and the Islands, and up again to Liverpool, bringing all manner of toys and trinkets for little Miss Martha. All the delight of that child was to read of voyages and travels; and when the *Wheel of Fortune* was in Liverpool dock, and I was ashore, she and me would make believe to go a-cruising around the wide world. We'd cruise from the Nor'-West Passage (which nobody can't discover) to Straits of Magellan, away to the East Indies, and back by the Cape, a-taking in victuals of the Dutchmen there, and so nor'ard with a convoy up the Guinea Coast, and home through the roaring forties—but never did we sail to the Island where she were born.

“I'll be Captain John Davis, in the *Desire*,” says she, “and you be Sir Thomas Cavendish, Crowby, in the *Galleon*, and you must call me the Rear-Admiral, and I'll call you the General.”

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“Sir Thomas were a wicked bad skipper to sail under, Miss Martha,” I’d say. “He used for to maroon poor seamen sick of the scurvy, and leave them to die miserable.”

“Yes, I know,” says she, with her forehead all a-wrinkle, “but you are to be wrecked quickly, and then *you* can be John Davis, and *I’ll* be Sir Walter Raleigh, and we’ll fight the Spanish Armada, and take the Señora del Rosario. Pipe the men to quarters,” she would cry, a-walking the quarter-deck on the parlour table, and pipe I would, and forthwith we sails into perils and disasters and shipwreck, and fetches up to dinner chock-a-block with plunder.

You might have thought that Miss Deborah, being a pious woman, would forbid such doings, not to mention the wear and tear ; but no, she even took a part, provided she were allowed to sit quiet in her chair. She was a pretty little maid once, was Miss Deborah. There were a picture hanging in the parlour, the likeness of Miss Deborah when she were twelve year old. She had cheeks as ruddy as cherries, and a quantity of hair as yellow as wheat straw, by the artist’s account of it. Time and again, I’ve seen her looking up at that there picture, Martha standing beside her ; and the picture were like Martha in the matter of face and

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hair, wonderfully like ; but only the grey eyes, which was bright and lively like a bit of dancing sea, was like the little brown old lady and the child as well.

“Mind you, child,” she would say, “that was the living image of your old aunt when she was a little girl same as you are now. And to think that all those years I’ve never set foot outside Liverpool town, nor seen a glimpse of the great world, and my own brother a sailor ! Be you more fortunate, child. But there ! we know not what shall come to us. ’Tis in the Lord’s hand, as we may truly say.”

The Captain was but little in the house in his days ashore, being busied all day long with cleaning and repairing ship, and transacting business with his agents ; and the more he had to do, the better pleased he was. All the six years we was trading in the West Indies, the *Wheel of Fortune* never touched at the Island, where were his wife and his little son. Whether or not he wrote to Madame, or she to him, is more than I know. ’Twas during this time the war began betwixt England and the most of all the world, America, France, Holland, and Spain ; and the press-gang was afoot in all ports. Two or three times, when I have been sitting in Miss

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Deborah's parlour, nights, the room bright and peaceful with fire and candle, the kettle hissing on the fire all ready for the Captain's grog, there would come a rush of feet on the pavement outside, shouts and cries, and maybe the noise of a scuffle. Miss Deborah would set her fingers in her ears at the sound of the words that was flying, and the child would look up with a flush on her cheeks, and would have peeped aside the blind to see the press-gang, had not Miss Deborah forbade her.

For six years the *Wheel of Fortune* sailed in the Guinea trade, as I said; and though the foreign privateers were ranging the seas, the *Wheel of Fortune* escaped them all. But when we come home from the last voyage, and was a-hauling in the Mersey, there was a King's ship, the *Royal Hunter*, lying at anchor, what hailed us, demanding twenty men of our crew. Captain Scroope he refuses, naturally; whereupon the *Royal Hunter* eased off a bow-chaser at us. The shot passed through the jib and went rambling ashore and knocked over a person in the town, so I heard tell afterwards. But heave to, not we! The *Royal Hunter* manned her boats, and the press-gang landed on our heels; there were a stern chase through the streets, and a fight (we being desperate angry and sharp set after a

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seven months' cruise). We beat them off; but the skipper took a pistol bullet through the chest, and dropped. Me and three seamen requisitioned a shutter and laid the Captain on it, and brought him home to his house. So the poor Captain came into his own front parlour feet first, where the table was laid and lighted for his supper, and the kettle steaming on the bright fire, all ready for his grog, as I had seen it many's the time. Miss Deborah was frightened as a sheep, and the little girl, she stood white-faced in the candle-shine, pitiful to see.

"Heart up, my pretty," I says to her, "your daddy's a little bit hurt to be sure, but nothing to be frightened of" (though I doubted he were badly hit). "Now fetch me a Sunday silk ankecher or two, and we'll soon put him shipshape and comfortable." The poor child stirred as smart as you please, and a seaman ran for a surgeon, but all to no avail. The Captain died before midnight, with never a word spoken. The inside pocket of his coat was full of little presents for the child, all wrapped up careful in yellow silk; but they was all stained and spoiled, and I took them away.

About a week after the funeral, I went to see the Captain's agent, and he handed me a letter. 'Twas from one of the nigger kings

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who I had done business in Old Calabar with. But the letter was dated from the Island where the Captain's wife lived a widow, if indeed she yet lived there. Many of these niggers could read and write in a fashion, strange though it appear; and they used often to consign letters to the agents of the trading captains, asking for particular articles of trade. My letter was from Grandy King Orrock Robin John. Here it is :

MR WILLIAM CROWBY.

Sir,—I take this opportunity to write to you I dar say you knows the place I now live in I am going to have a Town of my own I write to you because you not grandy man, if you grandy man you not trade many guns Send musquets Send gun for my own shuting 5 foot barill Send plenty of Cutlashes Send Powder and bullets I give Slave for every 2 gun Send sum small 3 pounders Send me one red and one blue coat with gould Lace for to fit a Large man when this cargo com I no chop you for all man for you bob me No chop too many times bionbi So no more at Preasent from your best friend

GRANDY ORROCK ROBIN JOHN

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This letter gave me plenty to think about. Grandy King Orrock had shipped himself from the West Coast to the Island, seemingly, where he was about planning some mischief. Of course he knew nothing of my old connection with the Island, else he would never have written to me. As it was, he wanted arms for some nefarious purpose, and he wrote to me rather than to a trading captain, as being less responsible, and so more likely to supply him with arms wholesale. It seemed to me, after some deal of thought, that Grandy King Orrock Robin John were about stirring up insurrection among the niggers, with intent to take the Island from the French, to whom it belonged at that time, and turn it into a slave station. Niggers is such foolishness, I've known 'em take such notions often; but they mostly comes to nothing. But niggers is crafty, too; and no white man has ever yet fathomed the Obeah devilry. Altogether, I was a good deal put about on accounts of Madame, she being the child's mother and all. And a-walking down the street still thinking deeply, I were surrounded by the press-gang, the very same gang off of the *Royal Hunter*, before I see the swabs. They was too many to fight with; and they carried me aboard peaceable. And when a pressed man is once

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fairly aboard a King's ship, there is but one thing for him to do, as I've always maintained. There he is, and he must set to and make the best of it.

The *Royal Hunter* she put to sea with the next tide, and laid her course for the West Indies, to cruise for protection of merchantmen. We was some weeks out when we fell in with a French frigate, *La Joletta*, and fought her yard-arm to yard-arm for seven glasses—which is three hours and a half, shore-time. Our forward magazine blew up, the ship took fire in three places, and we was so sore beset, the Frenchman being bigger than we, and carrying greater guns, that the end of it was, we struck. A prize crew of Frenchmen was transferred to the *Royal Hunter*, in the usual way, and part of our crew exchanged aboard *La Joletta*. They left me aboard the *Hunter*, and me, and eleven more, was sent into the hold to stay until the ship were put to rights. Being mighty dry, I hallooed for the ship's boy to bring a pannikin of water. 'Twas dark in the hold, all but the glimmer of a lantern; yet it seemed to me the boy was a different boy from ours, and "Who may you be, sonny?" I says to him.

"Ship's boy, sir," says he. "I am a prisoner

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too, sir," he says, "come aboard from the Frenchman."

I know'd his voice — ah, right well I know'd it! but I couldn't place it not in that minute; and I asked him how he come to be taken prisoner. He was took, he said, in the *Providence*, Letter of Marque out of Liverpool. The captain of *La Joletta* sent the *Providence* into Cherbourg harbour, or somewheres, and kept two or three of her crew aboard, being short-handed.

"And what's your name?" I asked him, and then he fairly knocks me sideways, for, "Martin Scroope, sir," says he, as glib as you please. "What!" I says; and in a minute or two, I sees it all, clear. "All right, sonny, you may go," I says, so that none of my mess-mates should suspect anything.

As the boy turned to go, I reached for the lantern, and turned it towards him; and sure enough, there was the child Martha's little square face and grey eyes, her hair combed back and tied in a little tarry queue. She told me the story when we found time and opportunity. Poor old Aunt Deborah had taken to her bed a week after the Captain's funeral; and within another week, she had followed him home. The minister of the parish took Martha into his house; but Martha

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couldn't abide the minister nor his wife, nor his house, nor anything what was his ; so she bought a boy's kit, and ran away to sea. It seems a bold thing for a lass to do ; but 'tis done sometimes, though they don't ship so young in general ; and you are to remember how the child's head was stuffed with yarns of the sea and stories of old voyages and famous ships.

"Heart up, my pretty," I says, "and put your trust in old Will'm Crowby, and never tell no one who you are, whatever you do"; and I sets my wits to work, for we were all in a clove hitch, surely.

We was sailing southward still, as tender to *La Joletta* ; the prize crew give us plenty of liberty, they being twenty-three to our twelve, not counting the child ; and one day, in a spell of rough weather, seeing the Frenchmen nearly all aloft, it come into my mind, like the word of God, why not retake the ship ? I puts it to my shipmates, and they all agrees hearty ; and the next time the most of the crew was up topsides (where we should have been instead of them, had the Lieutenant in charge owned any sense), we knocks down the watch on deck with marlinspikes and such before the men aloft could get down, breaks open the fore-cabin where the arms was ; and

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then we had the upper hand. *La Joletta* was hull-down to leeward at the time, so she never give no trouble; we crowded sail most immoderate; and pretty soon *La Joletta* were lost to sight. I never clapped eyes on her since, nor never wanted to it. I goes to the Lieutenant, whom I had laid in irons, and I put matters to him, through our Linguist, very direct. I showed him Grandy King Orrock's letter; I told him what I suspected, and as much about Madame's situation as I thought fit; I reminded him that the Island were French property; and I offered, free and fair, if he would navigate the ship to the Island, to help him deal with the niggers, and afterwards set him and his men in any French port among the Indies, so's he let us keep the ship. Had he refused me, I would have strung him to the yard-arm like any buccaneer — leastways threatened it — laid the course by dead reckoning and chanced it; but the pretty little dolly Lieutenant accepted like sweet oil. I reckon he hoped to fall in with another French ship on the way; but we never did. Of course I told him no word about his ship's boy — nor not likely, says you; nor did I say aught about Madame to the child herself. Marceline had been brought up to believe her mother were dead and become a

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holy angel with a palm and a harp and a crown; and so, for aught I knew she might be, especially with that black swab, Grandy King Orrock Robin John a-cruising gay and free about the Island.

A-sailing large before the nor'-east trade, we was soon in amongst the Indian Islands; crashing through the deep water that is black like marble, with the Islands rising up in sugar-loaf hills and sliding by on either bow, all trees from truck to water-line, and all a-shining and a-shimmer in the sun and wind like the colours on a peacock's neck, and a purple squall, maybe, overhauling us to windward. Marceline were most wonderful pleased and happy; I made her my cabin-boy; and on that fair passage she got her health again, which had been hurt by the bad victuals and the rough life. All the time she never knew we was sailing to her mother, and the place where she were born.

We fetched up at the Island at night-time; and such a quiet night I never see. Not a sign nor sound of niggers, what was most usually a-singing and a-drumming; naught but the frogs' and lizards' little song coming in a chant off-shore, where the fire-flies was twinkling; nor no lights in the traders' huts above the harbour. Where all the

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niggers had got to was more than I could imagine.

We moored the *Royal Hunter* to the old bollard on the old jetty, in the shadow of the trees, and I held a council of war with the French Lieutenant and the ship's officers. The council over, we fired a gun, for to learn Grandy King Orrock of our coming. The echoes went rolling and rattling amongst the hills, and a drift of birds rose up a-crying from the woods, then all fell silent again; and we had naught to do but await the coming of Grandy King Orrock Robin John. I were obliged to stay for this nigger to come aboard, else I would have gone up to the house. As it was, I paced the deck for a couple of glasses, and Grandy King Orrock not coming, eased off another gun, then turned in. 'Twas broad morning when the watch on deck roused me, saying the niggers was alongside. We had run up English colours, and hauled down the pendant, so they should suspect nothing; and there were Grandy King Orrock Robin John and a dozen niggers, all a-grin.

No sooner were they aboard, than the quarter-master, who had his orders, lowered the boats, cast off, towed the *Royal Hunter* into mid-harbour, and dropped anchor.

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Grandy King Orrock was in the cabin drinking rum, when the ship begun to move. "Why you cast off?" says he, excited. We told him we feared the ebb would leave us stranded (though there was six fathom of water at the jetty, at low tide), and he took it down, being a nigger.

The most of that day was spent in wearisome palaver with Grandy King Orrock; I was trying to find out what were his game in the Island, he was trying to trade all the while, without telling me. It takes a long spell to get the wind of a nigger King; but by means of rum and tactics, I done it at last, and got what I wanted out of him. Things being contrary in Old Calabar, Grandy King Orrock Robin John having quarrelled with his brother Grandy King Ephraim Robin John Robin, Grandy King Orrock took passage with a trader, and got landed on the Island, where traders sometimes puts in for wood and water; and what he wanted (just as I had guessed) was to take and rule the Island for himself.

"Well, you come to the right ship, Grandy, when you come aboard this here," I says. "Now I'm a-going to take a turn ashore, and when I come back we'll talk business."

Nothing would serve that nigger but he

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must come ashore too, and the other niggers was just as eager. I couldn't make it out; and Grandy King Orrock becoming obstreperous, he were knocked on the head and put in irons; and the rest were shackled together, two by two, wrist and ankle, in the old customary way, as quick and easy as drinking.

Finding I was about going ashore, Marceline begged and prayed of me to take her along. At first I would not; then I bethought me that the Island were safe enough so long as Grandy King Orrock were laid by the heels; and that whatever were the state of affairs up at the house, Marceline would suffer no disappointment, she being ignorant of the history. So I took her along. We landed just at sunset, when the sun rushes like into the sea, and the dark falls like a curtain.

"It's just as if I had been here before," says Marceline, as she and I struck into the path leading up through the woods. "And I know the way, I know the way, Crowby!" she says. "Have I ever been here before, Crowby?"

(She always called me "sir" before public, and "Crowby" as of old, when we was alone, and never made no mistake.) "Why, how could you, missie, unless in a dream, perhaps?" I says.

"It must have been in a dream," says she;

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and never asked me no more questions, although I could feel she was all a-tremble with excitement.

The house stood all dark and silent, except for a light in the north-east room, which was Madame's own parlour. Where in the world was all the niggers? I wondered; I began to suspect they was up to some devilry or another; and I stood still in the verandah to consider. I were a fool to bring the child, I thought; but I didn't know, then, the extent of foolishness.

"My pretty," I says, "I've got a little business to talk over with the person of the house. I sha'n't be hardly a minute—you won't mind a-waiting for me? See, I shall be close here," and I pointed to the light which shone behind the mosquito curtains.

"No," she says, obedient, but not hearty.

"Cheer up, my pretty," I says. "You're as safe here as if you was in your own home."

I left her wrapped in my boat cloak in a cane chair in the verandah, and I went in and knocked at Madame's door. 'Twas a chill evening, but the sweat boiled out upon me as I stood on the mat.

"*Entrez*," says the voice of my lady, as it might have been six years ago, and I steps inside and shuts the door.

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She were seated beside the lamp, reading. There was grey in her hair, and she looked thinner. She looked at me, a-leaning a little forward, and her lips fell apart.

"Who is it?" she says, as I steps into the lamplight. She made a little exclamation in the French language; and "How come you here, Crowby?" she asks, quiet-like; but her face was terrified.

"William Crowby, stand by," I says to myself, "Madame," I says, out loud, "'tis hard to tell you, cruel hard—but if I comes with bad news in one hand, I comes with good news in t'other."

She rose up and stood facing me.

"Do you come from the Captain?" she says.

"God be good to us all, my lady—the Captain's gone to his Father in Heaven, wheres all good sailors goes."

I looked she would have fallen in a swoon, or burst out a-crying, and stood by for casualties. But she did neither; she turned to her book, a-lying open on the table, and fingered the pages. "How did it happen?" she said, looking down at the book.

I told her, so well as I could, and feeling a trifle easier as I went on. I was telling her

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Miss Marceline were well and happy, and grewed to be a fine girl, when she interrupted me sudden.

"I let her go, do you know why?" she says, speaking very quick and earnest. "You never guessed why, no? I will tell you. I could not go with my husband, and I could not keep Marceline with me."

Then she told me a curious thing, which, not knowing the nigger, I should not believe; but, knowing the nigger as I do, I believe it true. There was (said Madame) a superstition among the niggers that an evil spell were upon the estate, and upon all the people, because, in the year the boy, Marceline's brother, was born, the sugar-cane was all rotten; and they had made out as how 'twas the fault of the little girl, Miss Marceline, and that so long as she were alive, so long would the curse remain. That was why the Obeah-Man had tried to poison the child; and poisoned she would have been, had she stayed upon the Island, for every nigger is no better than a whipped dog to the Obeah.

While my lady was talking, I see, with the tail of my eye, a nigger standing outside the curtains on the verandah, indistinct in the dark; but when I turned my head to look, he were gone. When my lady had done, I

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tells her I had made so bold as to bring Miss Marceline along with me in the ship.

"Where is she?" asks my lady, breathless.

"In the verandah," I says, "this blessed minute"; and the next moment we was both outside.

I never had a worse knock-down in all my life—and I've had a-many—when I see the chair empty, and no child anywheres. For the minute, I thought she might have strayed into the garden, and I stood and called her.

"Where's all the niggers, my lady?" I says. "Can they be a-taking care of her?"

"The servants?" Madame cried. "The servants are all away—there is an Obeah-dance in the woods, these two nights. There are no servants remaining at all."

"Begging your pardon, my lady," I says, "I see one in the verandah just now"; and I had scarce uttered the words when a dreadful notion took me, and Madame cried out in the same moment, and put out her hands, as though putting something away.

"O my good God!" I says; and I stood a minute and thought, ah! as hard and as lively as ever I thought in my life. "My lady," I says, "stand by, and act quiet and cool, and

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follow my orders, if you please, for there's all our lives depending on it."

She were a brave lady, though French, and she followed my orders quick and quiet. She led me straight into the nursery—Miss Marceline's old nursery—and there were the little boy a-sleeping quiet, with his curls astray upon his pretty flushed cheek. We wakened him gently, and my lady told him it was a new play; and I took him in my arms, all wrapped in blankets, and he laughed and talked, as pleased as could be—never one of your crying sort, wasn't little Master Martin. Then we goes throughout the house, my lady carrying a lamp. There were a miniature portrait of Miss Marceline hanging on the wall in my lady's room, which put me in mind of the picture in the parlour, back in Liverpool, in the old times. My lady takes the miniature before she goes to her jewel-case, and puts it in her dress. We stayed for naught else; my lady with her jewel-case, and me with the boy, we left the house open and we runs down the path to the shore. Standing on the jetty, I took my pipe and blew *All hands to quarters*, and I could hear the order repeated, like a clear loud echo, aboard the *Royal Hunter*, a-lying out in the creek. That's where discipline comes in, you see. I pulled off in the

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cock-boat with my lady and the boy in the stern-sheets, he a-talking and a-laughing all the time, wild with pleasure. I made the oars bend, I reckon ; and no sooner were we aboard, than I called the Linguist, and spoke through him to the Lieutenant, and to all the ship's company, standing to attention at quarters.

‘You see this lady?’ I says, “the good lady of my old skipper, Captain Martin Scroope. Her little daughter has been stole by the niggers for the Obeah.”

Every soul aboard knew the meaning of Obeah, which the other name is cannibalism, and there were a stir and a murmur amongst the crew, standing strict to attention. The Lieutenant he broke out into a torrent of talk ; the Linguist he translated to me ; and we settled what to do, immediate. I never wish to see a ship's company stir smarter than what the crew of the *Royal Hunter*, French so well as British, stirred that night. Five men (and four of 'em sick) was left aboard, and thirty manned the boats, armed with muskets, pistols and cutlasses. I had a notion as to where the Obeah-dance might be ; and before I went over the side, I see a little wavering glow, like the light from a fire, reflected in the sky above the woods ; and I took the bearings of that.

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The boats raced ashore, and the men had tumbled out upon the jetty and were forming up in single file smart as the order were spoken. The Island were only about the bigness of the Isle of Wight at home; and knowing it all like the palm of my hand, I were able to lead the party directly towards the place where I had seen the faint light. We went along the narrow track through the bush at the double, and chanced the *fer-de-lances*, the poisonous snakes of the place; and all the way, I kept a-seeing in my mind, like in a looking-glass, the great fire, and the heap of half-killed, struggling cocks and hens and animals, and the naked niggers of the Obeah; and I were sick with fear lest the child should lose her wits by reason of the horror, even though we came in time. I never know'd the way were that long before; "God strike me dead," I says, "after the niggers is scuppered, if we ain't in time." Then we hears the drum-drum of the tom-toms a-beating, and the hollow screech of the conch-shells; the trees begins to thin out; and next we sees a ring of blacks all a-tossing, like black spray, about a great red fire.

There were no holding the men; they loosed off the muskets, dropped them, and charged with cutlasses, cheering. I made one

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run of it, for I see a tall nigger holding a little figure in his arms. But run as I might, that there French Lieutenant outran me, and overhauls the nigger, and cuts him down. As I come up, I see the child's eyes was banded, and I thanked God for that, and picked her up. The nigger lay with his head in the dust, with one cheek uppermost; there was long scars on it; and I reckon they was the marks of Captain Scroope, what he scored with the Obeah-Man's own witch-bottle, years ago. I never stopped to look about, but started to double back to the ship; but I see the big cauldron hung on three poles over the fire, a cauldron such as we use to refine the sugar, and a thick steam agoing up; and the screams of the niggers, all running and dying, was like a sweet music to me.

I give the child to her mother, and sore she needed her tending, but she come all well and hearty in a while. 'Twas a matter of three hours before the party come aboard; and, to one not used to the sight of action, they would have made a shocking spectacle. As for the Obeah-Man, they had burnt him to a cinder before they come away.

Next morning, we went ashore, took all the gear out of the house, left it an empty hulk, and weighed anchor with the morning

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tide ; for my lady had taken a horror of the Island. The crew began to ask about for the cabin-boy, here and there ; so I judged it well to tell them the truth, since they were sure to find it out. They cheered the ship's boy, hearty, did his saviours, the French a-piping up with the British ; and double rations of grog was served to all hands.

The French Lieutenant — who was most wonderful polite to my lady—with his crew, we sets ashore in Port-au-Prince, according to agreement. “I no chop you for all man for you bob me no chop too many times by-and-by,” I says to Grandy King Orrock Robin John, a-quoting from his letter (he referred to a pleasant little way we had of throwing the dice for slaves), and I give him and six of his niggers to the Lieutenant for a present. The six remaining slaves of Grandy King Orrock's gang was treated as plunder, and sold in Port Royal for the benefit of the *Royal Hunter's* crew.

Having parted with the French, and shipped some new hands, we sailed to Jamaica, fetched up in Port Royal, and give up the ship to the Governor, who treated us handsome, and took my lady and the children into his house. The estate on the Island were sold to a French planter ; and with that, and the money the

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Captain left (and a goodish sum that were) my lady bought an estate in Jamaica; and there she lives with the children, all of them well and happy, at this moment of writing.

As for me, William Crowby, Boatswain, I am general messenger and servant to Miss Marceline; and hoping to continue in the same all the days of my life, I close this narrative, which I begun for her pleasure.

